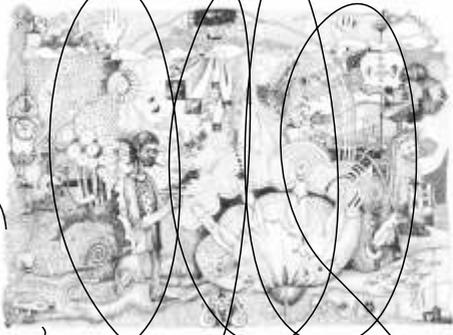
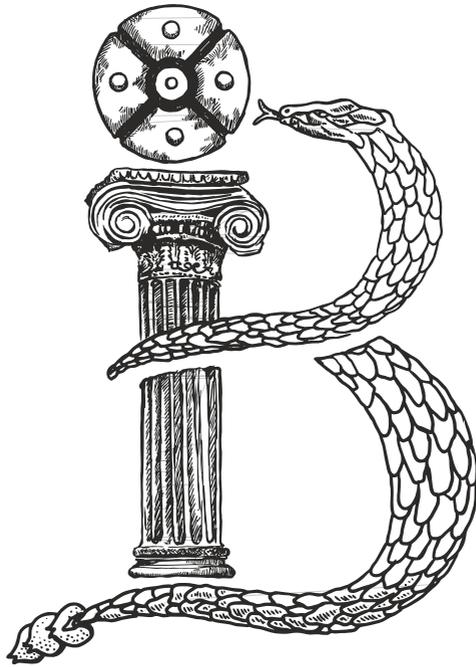


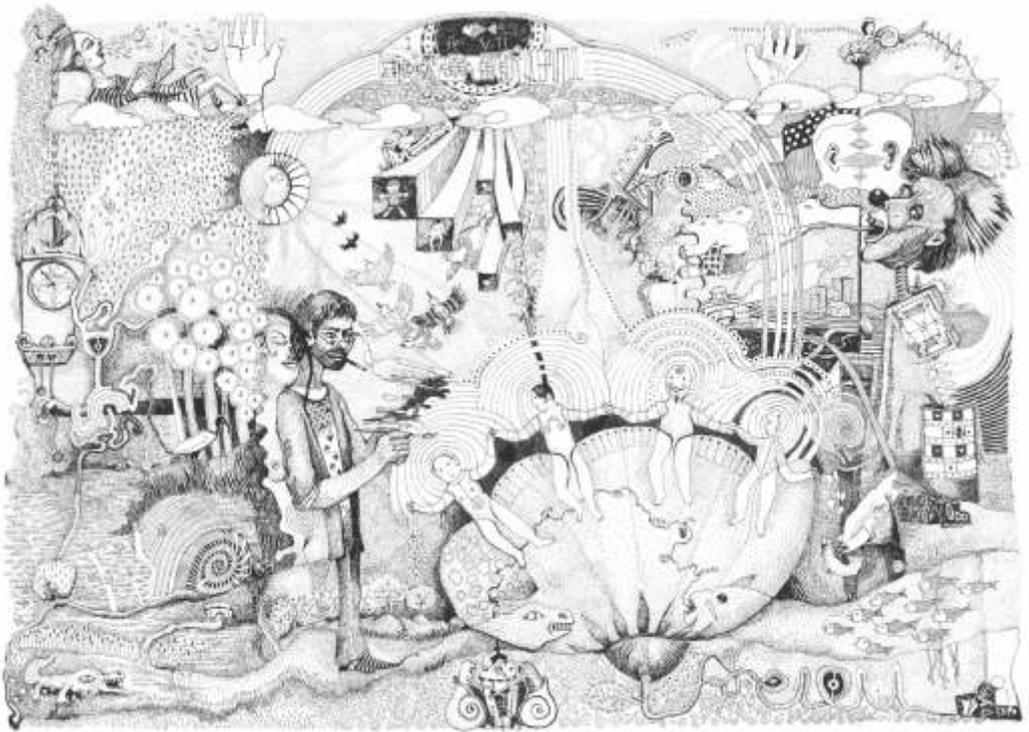
Ion Baic

Mystical Windows beginnings



ION BAIC'S ILLUSTRATIONS





PROLOGUE

It happened. Ion discovered a very peculiar drawing in the basement of the house where he lived. It was old and corroded by time. When he touched the hatching lines with the tips of his fingers, he felt the strokes completing the story of the image, and visions appeared in his mind as if he had experienced them once before.

-How bizarre, am I reincarnated? he wondered.

He continued to feel the ink lines on the old paper. As he studied the drawing, a crow approached the basement window, tapping its beak against the glass three times. Ion looked at it closely and noticed that it held a note in its claws. Approaching the crow, he was surprised to find that the bird was not afraid of him. Ion opened the window wide, and the crow hopped onto his hand, dropping the note into the artist's palm. Ion unfolded the note and read its contents. The text detailed information about the drawing in front of him. The note said the following in an ancient language:

"Ion, you are reading these lines because you touched this drawing you are looking at now. Even though it's old, it was created by you; you have been and will be an artist in all spaces and times in which you manifest.

Once you touched this drawing, a bridge was formed between multiple worlds and times, as you have reached between them, having the ability to see them all. A long time ago, you were the messenger of divinity in the time of Jesus, and later brought divine creation to southern France, illustrating love, death, contemporary society, time travel, and both the beginning and the end. You carried the divine further into the new world, specifically in the year 806, then understood how treacherous the world is, battling the forces of evil, unraveling intrigues and hidden secrets of mysteries that remain unsolved to this day. You delved into their world, discovering that there are people with hands stained with blood, envy, pride, poison, and venom, becoming exhausted."

Ion was genuinely stunned by what he heard, and he read the note as if he knew the ancient language for a lifetime. Why did he hear it? Because, while reading the note brought by the crow, he heard the voice of the woman from the drawing he was studying. He felt it. Everywhere Ion went, the crow was by his side, watching him. They became very close friends. Too bad Ion didn't know how to communicate with the bird in its language. He framed the drawing, hanging it on a nail in the corner of his studio.

For hours, he pondered the idea of discovering himself and finding the purpose and meaning of that drawing, unraveling the hidden mystery of the woman drawn on that aged paper. Sitting at his desk, the crow appeared at the balcony window with a goose feather in its beak, carved and dirtied with hardened ink at the tip. When Ion took the feather and looked at the drawing hanging on the wall, the woman in the drawing began to fade until she disappeared completely, sensing her presence behind the artist. Calmly, Ion turned his head and, surprised, saw something voluminous under the sheet on his studio bed. Trembling with emotions, he approached the sheet and lifted it, shocked by what was underneath. A beautiful woman was sleeping, her nudity sending chills down the artist's spine.

- What the hell, Ion said to himself, where did she come from?

At that moment, he realized that his new friend, the crow, had disappeared, and the goose feather seemed to have evaporated, merging into the content of the drawing. Ion approached the woman in his studio, trying to wake her gently, leaning in and saying:

- Who are you? Where did you come from? Do you have a connection

to the world of spirits? What's your name? I have so many questions to ask you, am I dreaming?

At that moment, the beautiful mysterious woman opened her eyes slowly, smiling. Looking at Ion, she said:

- Wonderful, finally, I see you. You are so beautiful, just like the last time we met. Even though I'm here, you can't touch me. I'm not afraid that you'll reject me when you feel my essence, and I run and hide when I sense your presence. My emotion, anticipation, trembling, and melancholy resonate deeply with your creativity and your thirst for knowledge. Our minds can merge, and our vibrations will unite, and we can only touch each other when our creations complement each other. I am your creator from another dimension, where you created me but in different times.

- What's your name? Ion asked.

- My name is the Lame Singer, she replied.

At this revelation, Ion tried to touch the woman's hand in front of him. Still, he noticed that as soon as his hand intertwined with hers, the woman disappeared, reappearing in the drawing hanging on the wall.

- Weird, Ion said. A strange world, as if I'm living in a twilight from which I have never awakened.

Saying these things, Ion took the drawing off the wall, wiped its glass of dust, and headed to the old library in the city on the west side of the fortress, his hometown, a city of great historical importance.

- I need to find a specialist to interpret this drawing. And where else but at the old library? Ion said to himself as he left the house, collecting household waste and throwing it into the dumpster. Then, with the drawing under his arm, he got into his small car and drove to the library. While driving past the church, suddenly, the woman from the drawing appeared in front of him. Ion slammed on the brakes, realizing that he had just avoided hitting a pigeon that suddenly took flight towards the sky. This situation is highlighted in this drawing. Who is the mysterious woman? Who is the Lame Singer?

Amidst the multitude of thoughts, Ion arrived at the old library, parked his car, got out with the drawing under his arm, and timidly approached the library door. Standing in front of the entrance, he took a deep breath, as if going for an interview for an important

position, pressed the door handle, which opened with an echo and a creak of the old door. The library interior was quite dark, but he noticed that it was quite lively, seeing several people who were very attentive to someone giving explanations.



In the building's lobby, the institution's manager was present with some distinguished guests, to whom he explained the history of the library and the city. Amidst his words, his eyes focused on Ion, who looked perplexed left and right, trying to find someone to talk to and explain the situation, even though there was a probability that no one would believe him. He thought about this aspect, considering that he might be targeted by authorities as experiencing hallucinations. Disappointed, he lowered his head, reconsidering, choosing to exit with the drawing in hand. As he opened the door to leave the building, he felt a hand from behind touching his shoulder.

- Sir, I notice you have an old graphic manuscript framed under your arm. Can we see it? It was the library manager.



- Of course! Ion said, smiling broadly. It's... it's... an old drawing that I found in the basement where I live, and what's inexplicable is that it represents me, he uttered with half a mouth, bowing his head again.

- Please give me a minute to escort my guests to the exit, after which I'll invite you to my office to discuss this aspect, which is extremely interesting, said the manager, not taking his eyes off the old ink drawing.

- Please follow me, the library manager told Ion. I'll show you something very interesting that is closely related to some representations in the illustration you found. But how did this document end up in your basement? the manager of the library asked, puzzled.

- I know it seems like it's from supernatural novels, Mr. Manager, but... I drew it in the year 806... it seems strange, but what happened to me this morning is inexplicable, Ion replied.

- I'm listening.

Ion recounted in the smallest detail the encounter with the Lame Singer and the receipt of the note describing the drawing in detail and his personal identity between worlds.

- If you don't believe me, please, check the authenticity of this note. Saying this, Ion handed the note brought by the crow to the library manager.

The manager took the note and studied it, amazed by the

artist's narrative.

- Sir, I must tell you that this old sheet of paper drawn by you... in what year did you say? 806, indeed belongs to an extremely rare book in our library. Saying this, the manager took a ruler and measured the dimensions of the drawing's sides, thinking aloud:

- It's identical in size to the Codex, incredible, and it seems to date back to the year it was created, but it's not considered theft because it doesn't belong to this part that we own, nor to another, even though it is part of the entire codex, but separately. Very interesting, and beyond that, it recounts moments and things that have happened in the past and present and will happen in the future. I've only read about these drawings in an old manuscript.

- Drawings, Mr. Manager? Are there more?

- Of course, it is said that there are six drawings, which, placed in the correct order on the five corners of a pentagram and in the middle, form a spell that grants immortality to the one performing this ritual. But I thought it was just a legend, and you confirmed that it is real through this drawing. The exact location of these drawings is unknown; it's very hard for me to believe that you have reincarnated and drawn them, but if it's real, you surely have some clues as to where the others might be. Moreover, the description of the first drawing was brought by a crow. There are elements of symbolism and mysticism. I apologize for not introducing myself earlier. I am Cristian, the manager of this prestigious library.

- Ion, you can call me Ion, and if you allow me to add, those five corners you mentioned need to be framed within an Ouroboros?"

- Dear Ion, here's the deal. Please don't tell anyone about this drawing and what happened, and speak only with me. Here's my phone number. Cristian handed Ion a business card, which Ion placed in the bag he carried over his shoulder.

- Thank you, Mr. Cristian.

- Just Cristian, please."

In his thoughts, Ion asked himself a few questions: Why is the manager so friendly with him, and why is he trying to get so close as a confidant? Does he have hidden interests?

Suddenly, the drawing Ion held in his arms began to glow, and on the manager's desk, the Lame Singer made an appearance, sitting, enveloped in a monotonous shade of blue, contrasting with white in

places, similar to a hologram.

- Ion, I'm glad to see you again. You touched the glass of the frame where I am drawn with the tips of your fingers, which is why I am here with you. This drawing is very valuable. Put it away carefully because, thanks to it, you will gain immortality.

She extended her small and trembling fingers towards him.

Ion gently touched her fingers, and she gradually melted until the woman disappeared, reappearing in the drawing, while he remained with his hand extended above Cristian's desk, as if he had dreamed.

- Whom did you summon, Ion? Cristian asked, looking puzzled at the artist, observing his gestures. "Did you have another vision?"



- It's irrelevant, Mr. Manager, Ion said. Please return the crow's note. There's no need to escort me. Saying these things, Ion took the note, stood up, and headed towards the library exit, getting into his car, driving home, terrified by what was happening.

On the way home, he wondered whether he should go to the doctor or let events unfold on their own.





Arriving home, he realizes that his love for creation contributes significantly to the community of which the artist is a part. Ion hangs the drawing on the nail on the wall of his studio and checks his emails, realizing that he has to fulfill a portrait commission for a fee that helps him survive every day. He starts drawing at his desk, admiring the evening falling through the window.

"What a day full of adventures," he said in his thoughts, his attention divided between the portrait he had started and the mystical drawing in front of him. Two hours had passed, and Ion had completed the requested commission, sending an email to the client with the portrait attached. He wrote:

"Mr. Arion, I have completed the portrait you commissioned. Since the photograph was severely damaged and the person inside it was already mummified, I reconstructed certain parts of the facial features, using my imagination to faithfully capture the expression of this mummy's face."

"Why did they send me to draw a dead person?" Ion wondered. "Does it even matter? At least I've got money for cigarettes for a few days." After sending the email, Ion changed into his pajamas, got under the covers, thinking about the drawing on the wall and where the other five drawings might be, succumbing to a deep sleep until the next morning, a night in which he had a dream.

CHAPTER I

---THE DREAM---

„lon was walking down a long corridor that resembled the hallway of the apartment where he lived and had his studio. At the end of this corridor, there was a door. lon opened it, and from inside, a multitude of small birds rushed towards him, resembling hummingbirds with round heads, wrapped in feathers, and long beaks. There were a lot of them, speeding towards him, like bats emerging from a cave towards the light. At that moment, lon felt the need to defend himself by bowing his head, visualizing a stool nearby. He picked up the stool and covered his face to avoid getting hurt. The wave of birds passed, but in the plush of the stool, a delicate bird with soft feathers remained embedded. lon took it in his hand and felt its limp tenderness. At that moment, he felt repulsed, letting the delicate bird fall to the floor. When his eyes visualized it again, it was no longer that tender bird with soft feathers; it was a plush toy with eyes formed by two sewn buttons, and the wings were just plush elements, mounted on either side of the body. The plush bird began to grow. And it grew until it reached a size of thirty centimeters. Then, lon's desire was to take flight. He rode the bird and pushed the room's floor with his feet, feeling it lift off the ground, experiencing a reduced gravitational level, rising thirty centimeters, descending back to the ground, pressing again with his feet, taking it in the opposite direction of the hallway from where he came.

At the other end of this hallway, there was an opening like a door, the inside of which had no walls, everything white around, but somewhere in that space, there was a table with four legs. lon's desire was to see what was on that table, but he couldn't because when he took momentum to rise, the eye level only reached the level of that table. After several unsuccessful attempts, lon managed to see what was on that table. There were some orange balloons, which also began to grow, in front of his eyes, nothing else visible but a film of rubber of the same orange color, on the surface of which, black silhouettes could be observed.“

Ion opens his eyes, posing two questions to himself:

- Were those balloons expanding, or was I shrinking? At the moment when I observed only that orange film and the black silhouettes on its surface, was I inside those balloons, or outside them?

The phone rings, and Ion answers:

- Good morning, Mr. Arion. I sent you the email last night.

- Yes, I received it, and I called to thank you. You must be wondering why I sent you to draw the photograph of a mummified corpse.

- Indeed, if you could clarify this aspect for me, it would be extraordinary.

- Well, you've become a mature man at 44, with exceptional talent that some people fail to appreciate fully. What's even more spectacular is that you possess certain technical secrets that many people are unaware of. Let's say I am one of those who recognized the secret you use in certain portraits.

- What are you talking about, Mr. Arion?

- Unfortunately, I can't say it over the phone, but I invite you for coffee today at 9 am at "La vrăbiuța veselă." See you there, Ion. I'll wait for you on the terrace.

He hangs up the phone. It's 8:13, and Ion has almost an hour until the meeting. He takes a shower, dresses, has a slice of bread with butter and salami, a cup of milk, eats, and heads out, taking a leisurely walk to the mentioned place to meet Mr. Arion, expecting payment for his work and a plausible explanation from the client.

Arriving on the terrace, Mr. Arion is already at a table with two coffees.

- This is the best coffee in town. I ordered one for you as well; it's still warm. Mr. Arion says, shaking Ion's hand.

- Thank you. So?

- Ion, the line you use, especially in your portraits, has a 45-degree inclination, making a transition possible between the real world and that of sprites.

- I don't understand, Ion says.

- To make myself better understood, if you draw someone's portrait, the eyes of that portrayed client can see our world from the world beyond, after the real person you drew has died. This happens because, when you use that line with the inclination I mentioned, it becomes possible. And you intuited this aspect. I don't know how this is possible, but what's very interesting is that it worked for you. No one has

returned from the world beyond to certify that it's not true. But neither is it confirmed as real. It's just a theory that you invented, Ion, back when you were a student, but you've forgotten.

- Well, yes, some do return, but in the form of a hologram that we can't touch, Ion said.

- Can you be more explicit? Mr. Arion asked, taking a sip of coffee.

- Mr. Arion, I respect your interest in these matters, but it's a subject I'd prefer to avoid.

Unexpectedly, the Raven makes its appearance again, landing right beside their table. Ion notices it, expecting something strange to happen in the next few minutes. The Raven approaches Ion, hopping onto the artist's shoulder.

- Incredible! exclaims Mr. Arion. I've never seen such a friendly bird in my life. Ion, do you know the significance of the Raven? It's a solar symbol that has gained a negative reputation over time, bringing tragedy. It has negative symbolism, considered a bird of romantics, like yourself, Ion, but it's also seen as a messenger of death, fulfilling prophetic functions. But above all, they were attributed to the god Mithras, a Persian god of light. From the first to the fourth century, a lost cult called Sol Invictus deified it. Research suggests it had a significant connection to this city, even building a temple here, being the protective guardians of the 13th Gemina Legion, a Roman legion whose fortress is beneath this citadel where we are now.

- Sol Invictus?

- Yes, it means 'unconquered sun' in Latin. Not much has been written about them, but you're certainly involved in something that's entirely connected to this cult and a prophecy. Always pay attention to details, Ion, and don't forget where each object around you is placed, especially its significance.

- Mr. Arion, you know so much about symbols and the history of this city, Ion said, thinking he could trust him more than the library manager. If you allow me, I'd like to show you an old drawing that reflects life after death, telling the story of time travel, the creation of the world, reincarnation, present-day society, and the future. I showed it to the manager of the old library near this place, and I was surprised by what that man told me, although he asked me not to talk to anyone about it. I have the impression that he has hidden interests. But what's interesting is that this drawing I'm talking about is part of a ritual for

achieving immortality. Unfortunately, this ritual can only be completed with six drawings, and I only have one, with no idea where the others are. Plus, there needs to be an incantation, of course, like any spell.

- Ion, I've known you since your college days. You were a rebellious young man. You did only what suited you. You can trust me. I've been your client and confidant since then, and look, it's been 20 years. I can help you if you show me that drawing, and we can think about how to obtain the others. But know this; the fact that they are untraceable may be for the best. Don't you think? Because completing this spell you're telling me about could be devastating for humanity. I'm very curious about the composition of the drawing. Allow me to pay for the coffees, and let's go to see it. Waiter!

The two headed to Ion's house, reached his studio, and the artist showed Mr. Arion the drawing, taking it down from the nail on which it was hanging. Mr. Arion studied it carefully for a few minutes before saying:

- The style of this drawing is unique. Twenty years ago, I bought a similar drawing from you, where the devil was depicted in the center of the image. That drawing was contemporary to you, not as old as this one. I framed it, but on the way home, the glass in the upper-left corner broke. So, I went back to the framer to have the glass replaced, and something very frightening happened.

- What happened, Mr. Arion? Ion was all eyes and ears for what the professor was saying.

- When the framer detached the glass from its back frame, he saw black before his eyes and could barely stand, saying he felt very sick. I asked him to drink a glass of water and inquired if he had eaten anything, but he stared at me as if he had seen the devil. In fact, he had seen it, drawn by you. My mind goes quite far, Ion. If what I suspect is true, even the devil himself is looking for these drawings you've mentioned. Because I tend to believe that he has come out of the printed form and entered that glass frame to see if someone comes with artwork he's seeking, among the missing four, because I believe the drawing that belongs to me from 20 years ago is one of them. I have the drawing on my phone. Allow me to show it to you.



Mr. Arion explains to Ion that each object, associated with another, enables communication in the spirit world by linking a character to a specific narrative formed by those objects. The association of elements leads to communication, resulting in a metamorphosis that shapes a message through the depicted symbols.

-You are a good storyteller, Ion."

- Professor, last night I had a strange dream. Perhaps you can help me explain its significance. I know there's a philosopher who said about dreams that they reflect an immediately imminent future.

- Please, tell me about that dream, Mr. Arion said.

Ion began to narrate the dream in the smallest detail to the professor, describing the dream he had during a waking state. The professor took notes of certain important words from the content of this dream and said:

-lon, the fact that those small bird-like creatures resembling hummingbirds were flying towards you, and there were a lot of them, signifies betrayal. The moment you felt that bird stuck in the stool lifeless, it was probably dead, indicating pessimism, lack of confidence in yourself, and certain negative thoughts present in your life. Later, you mentioned that it transformed into a plush toy. An object. This, dear, symbolizes a trouble, as it was without feathers. The fact that it started to enlarge its form symbolizes power and maturity. You have become a mature person, but because that table you told me about was quite large, allowing the dreamer to observe what was on its surface, it reveals the fragility and vulnerability of the subject. The subject being the table with orange balloons, it means that you can have a significant influence on what this color expresses, which is a spiritual color indicating optimism, prosperity, and generosity. I had no doubt about this aspect, given that I know you quite well, but at the same time, it reflects the desire for wealth and success in life. With a talent like yours, I don't think you won't experience such things, but surely someone will offer you a path that you shouldn't refuse, as it might be directly linked to your destiny. And the fact that there were silhouettes of people on this color, in black, expresses your secrets, what is not known about you, and the desire of some to discover all this information about you, the other personality you have.

- Thank you, Mr. Arion. This inspires me to search for valuable clues to find the other drawings and the incantation, to be the first to have access to them and destroy them, so they don't fall into the hands of evil people who could destroy the Earth.

- Many clues emerge even by overlaying the two drawings. Saying this, the professor took a glass table, placed a light beneath it, and took out from the frame the secret codex work found by lon, positioning it on the glass table. Later, he printed from the phone's memory the image with the drawing depicting the devil, placing it over the drawing and matching it to the same dimensions. He studied carefully the overlap of the two drawings, being puzzled by a detail he observed, related to one of the four people formed from flower petals representing time and immortality. He noticed that overlaying with the other drawing highlighted a decapitated human head held by the devil in his left hand, representing the portrait of the country's patriarch.



- Surely, there is a connection between this patriarch and one of the drawings in the secret codex, said the professor. Probably an icon or a work with religious references. It's incredible how a drawing from the year 806 has so many similarities with another one from 2003 and how they communicate with each other. Clear clues stand out in the drawing through the years we see depicted on that timeline. Specifically, between the years 1156 and 1328. What could it be? The Church Inquisition! In the year 1250, a bloody reform was initiated by

the Catholic Church, aiming to execute all heretics of that time. Any ideas contradicting the writings of the Catholic Church were considered heretical. Things are connecting, Ion.

- Interesting, Professor.

- Yes, very."

- It reminds me of a William Blake engraving in which Satan tests Job, pouring all sufferings upon him. He was a visual artist in the Romantic era, an exceptional visionary and poet, going against all religious doctrines, inventing his own mythology and prophecy. Look at the overlap of the drawings, Ion. On the character's forehead, you can observe a spiral, which, according to some analyses, is a symbol of sacred geometry reflected in art and certain ritualistic dances, cults, magic, and witchcraft. There's something wrong with this patriarch. I'm convinced. Do you see those arcs of circles drawn from points surrounding the character's head created by the flower petal? It reminds me of Strappado, a torture device used during the Inquisition, where the condemned's hands were tied behind their back, and they were tortured by hoisting them into the air with a winch. In 1184, a commission was formed for the eradication of heretics, a reaction to a religious movement that started in southern France, against whom several crusades were undertaken, being persecuted or burned at the stake as heretics.

- Southern France? Ion said, looking surprised at the professor. I was told that I brought divine creation there as a reincarnated person.

- Who told you this?"

Ion took out the note brought by the crow from the drawer and handed it to the professor, then told him everything that had happened the day before, including the meeting with the library manager and their conversation.

- This note is written in the ancient language. How do you know this language?

- I don't know either, Mr. Arion. It's like I've known it forever. Only one person knows it, someone I learned it from when we were children. Vasu, a childhood friend.

- But can you see this woman you told me about? The lame singer?

- Yes, Professor. And I've noticed that she appears when I touch the line drawn with the tips of my fingers.

- Maybe it's time to call her to help us with the explanation of the drawing."

- Good idea. Saying that, Ion traces with the tip of his finger, feeling the line of the drawing that forms the Lame Singer, and she appears in the room where the two were, disappearing from the drawing.

- Has she come? the professor asked.

- Yes, Mr. Arion, please tell me if you see that this woman from the drawing has disappeared.

Mr. Arion looks at the drawing, exclaiming:

- Ah! Unbelievable!

From that moment, he looks at Ion with amazement and a foolish face. It's real, I thought it was just stories. With his hand, the professor sought support and tried to sit on a chair. He couldn't believe his eyes.

- I knew you were a special guy. Is she here? I don't see her or hear her, even though I would like this very much.

- Mr. Arion, this can be done, but you need to bring the drawing that I drew and sold to you in college to overlay it on this one, and additionally, a hemp rope, a gate key, and a book with thick covers.

Saying this, Ion pointed to the old drawing.

- Do you remember what you gave it to me for?

- Yes, for some wood engravings by Paul Olaru.

- I'll be back in no time!

Mr. Arion quickly got up from the chair, went out the door, running down the stairs to get his drawing from home, and bring it to Ion's apartment, along with the other elements requested by the artist. After 15 minutes, he was back. Panting, he sat on the same chair, holding a folder of drawings in his hand, opening it, and replacing that printer pattern with the original drawing, throwing the copy in the trash.

Ion took the book from the professor's hand, opened it in the middle, and inserted the key in such a way that the part with the loop remained uncovered so that the fingertips could hold it. After the key was tightly tied to the book's covers with a rope.

- How do you know? asked the professor.

- Once upon a time on Moon Street, after leaving the Arta cinema, I was invited to someone's house. We happened to invoke a spirit born on the same day as me but from different times. I thought it was a game at first, but after seeing how that book moved, giving answers to our questions, I realized it wasn't a game; it was very real.

- Whom did you invoke?
- My uncle who had been dead for over seven years. They told me he had to be dead for over a year, and he was for seven, probably stayed on earth and didn't go back where he came from.
- Are you completely ignoring me? said the Lame Singer.
- No, Singer, just a second, make an appearance for the professor too.
- Mr. Professor, please hold the loop of this gate key with your index finger and touch the place where the Lame Singer should be in the drawing. While I will hold the other end of the key with my finger, the index finger of the other hand will touch the drawn head of the patriarch superimposed on this character created from petals.

The professor and Ion held the loops of the key with their fingertips, letting the book, tied faithfully, hang from this key. With the other hand, the professor touched the place where the woman in Ion's drawing should exist, and at that moment, Ion touched the drawing in the mentioned place. A cold mist settled in the room; the air felt very thin with no smell, and the room turned blue.

- Good day, Lame Singer, said the professor, unable to take his eyes off the beautiful woman who appeared. She was naked, had a superb body, and a delicate face like a doll.

- Good day, Mr. Professor, I am very glad that you are helping Ion in this still-unexplained mystery, but let's not forget the reason I am here. What year is it?

- 2022, the professor said, trying to be as sober as possible, but the unintentional smile on his face gave him away. He was full of happiness because all the studies and teachings he had accumulated throughout his life revealed one of the greatest mysteries of humanity, directly related to the creation of the world and the emergence of communication between people, but above all, the world of spirits.

I have so many questions to ask you, and I start with this character, the devil, whose crown overlaps with Ion's drawing, and from the combination of the two, I see the mathematical symbol pi (3.14). What does this mean?

- Mr. Professor, the teachings about Pythagoras. That's where it all started; among the information gathered about him, I realized that he was Ionian. This was a region in Ancient Greece named after the legendary hero Ion, whom you can see next to you, the legendary ancestor of the Ionians. Pythagoras was born there. One observation

made by the Greek mathematician and philosopher caught my attention. Specifically, that the universe is an ordered and harmonious system of numbers and numerical relationships. Therefore, if we look at the devil's crown overlapping the drawing from 806, we can observe this symbol, pi, with a numerical value of 3.14, which says a lot of positive things. It's a number charged with ascent, talent, contributing to defining human destiny by revealing opportunities and the path to success.

- The fact that it appears on this devil's crown intrigues me, said the professor in a whisper.

- Mr. Professor, said Ion, I would be interested to learn more from the Lame Singer about the significance of this number as elements attributed to me.

- Ion, the number three represents spontaneity, growth, is related to the adventurous spirit you have always had, expansion, optimism, play, joy, creativity, authenticity in expression, referring very directly to the fact that you possess certain gifts from the great creator of the universe and talent to express yourself through creation. There are many similarities with the personality and character you possess, Ion, said the Lame Singer. Number one symbolizes new beginnings, initiative, motivation, intuition, and confidentiality. This number also represents the manifestation of your desires in reality. And number four represents concentration and determination, a very hard work done with effort, responsibility, and passion with endless resources that reflect inner wisdom and honesty.

- But what connection do these things have with the devil represented in the drawing? asked the professor.

- Initially, the Devil was good, it is said that by his actions, he was separated from God. He wanted revenge, to ruin this world, which in the Bible says that the Devil is the God of this world we are in now, and God is the ruler of this world and the entire universe.

- Now the drowning incident of the CERN researcher and his assistant the next day makes sense. I think this happened because they made this aspect public.

- What did he say, Ion? asked the professor.

- He mentioned that after extensive research with this large particle generator, they managed to contact spirits, open a significant portal, and communicate with them. But beyond that, they discovered the

secret of what happens to a person after they die, physically and spiritually, namely that they become a spirit. And this spirit will go through three states of aggregation. The first state he described is the informational state, where all writings, every virtual life lived through the prism of a character in a video game or a song or writing, the person in the spirit state will experience it only when he plays or writes it himself.

- Interesting, continue, said the professor.

- The second state of aggregation, he called it the energetic state, which was explained to have to do with classical ghosts, as we can see the Lame Singer under our eyes. And the third state of aggregation is matter. And matter is hell because hell is that thing that degrades, transforms, and destroys all the time. In my opinion, it could be planet Earth, Mr. Professor. After learning these things, I even asked myself a question related to paradise on Earth. How is this possible since there is so much suffering? Famine, pain. These things are certainly not part of paradise. And many people experience them.

- What this researcher said is surprising, especially since many aspects link to what your drawings represent, Ion, but above all, to what is written in the Bible. I'm tired, my hands are numb. I'm glad I met the Lame Singer and learned these important things, ah! I almost forgot what was more important. About the superimposition of the drawings from which emerges the man created from the petals of the flower, the spiral on the forehead, and the head of the patriarch.

- Ion, Mr. Professor, I am genuinely afraid to say why the head of the patriarch appears drawn in the hand of Satan. I live between the two worlds, this one where I am now and the other from where I come, more precisely in the year 806, at the time when this old drawing was created, found by Ion, which belongs to the Codex Cenannensis, or better known as the Book of Kells written and illustrated over six years, the missing pages of John have been lost or made to disappear in the eleventh century, from whose drawing I made my appearance, created by you. There I sleep and perceive this discussion I have with you, through the dream presence, because I am aware that the dream reflects an immediate near future when this aspect was brought to the public knowledge in your world by the philosophy professor Sigmund Freud.

- Mr. Professor, I think that's enough for today; I know your fingers have become numb while fixing this drawing. Saying these things, Ion put the book with the key tied faithfully aside. At that moment, the room cleared

up, and the Lame Singer had reappeared in the drawing.

- Thank you, Ion, said the professor. We'll stay in touch. Saying that, Mr. Arion headed towards the exit, taking his belongings.

- Allow me to escort you.

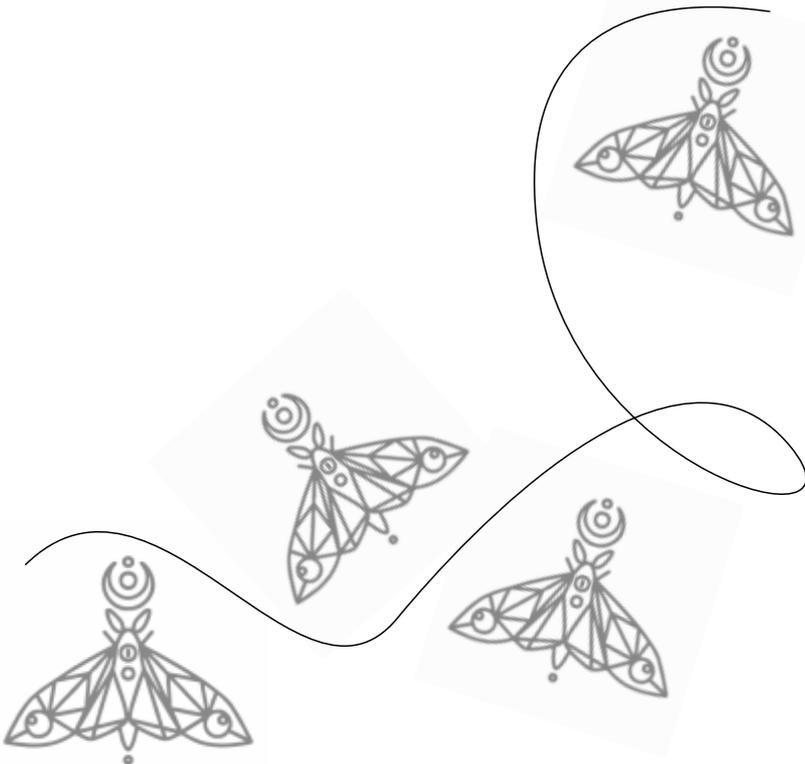
On the stairs, the professor asked Ion:

- I don't know why, but I have a dark foreboding about these drawings. What was your relationship with the Lame Singer? It's a question that has been bothering me since you first made contact with her.

- I haven't asked her, but I have already consumed her a lot. That's what I feel. So, they see us through dreams, Mr. Professor.

- Yes, I've noticed, said the professor, opening the building's door. We'll be in touch, Ion. Take care of yourself.

Why does it always have to be so complicated? When it can be very simple... In front of the building, making room for the professor to become invisible, the library manager appeared.



- Mr. Cristian! What a surprise, said Ion. Please come in! Meanwhile, the professor hid behind a tree and pulled out his phone, accessing the camera he had set up in Ion's workshop to listen to the conversation between the two, full of mysteries.

- I'm glad to see you, Ion. I found out where you live from Vasu, so I decided to pay you a visit, but I didn't call you because it's not safe to talk on the phone. It's 6:00 PM. I can't stay for long, so I'll be relatively brief.

On the stairs, the manager said to Ion:

-Have you talked to anyone else about this drawing? If yes, then you must be very careful because many people want to get their hands on this priceless treasure. This drawing. I came to take a picture of it with your permission to study it more thoroughly.

- Mr. Manager, I have learned some very interesting things about this drawing from the gentleman who left hastily in front of the stairs. He is Professor Arion, the one who told me when I was in college not to let a day pass without drawing at least one line on paper when he invited me for a brandy. We have known each other for a long time, and he is also an old customer of my drawings. I trust Professor completely.

- You shouldn't trust anyone, Ion. Saying that, the library manager takes a photo of the drawing, during which the professor watches with interest from behind that tree everything that happens, lighting a cigarette. Unfortunately, I can't stay. I have to run. Do you have my business card? Give me a call on Saturday, and we'll discuss more, Ion. Saying these things, the library manager left Ion's workshop.

- What a day, said Ion, checking his email.

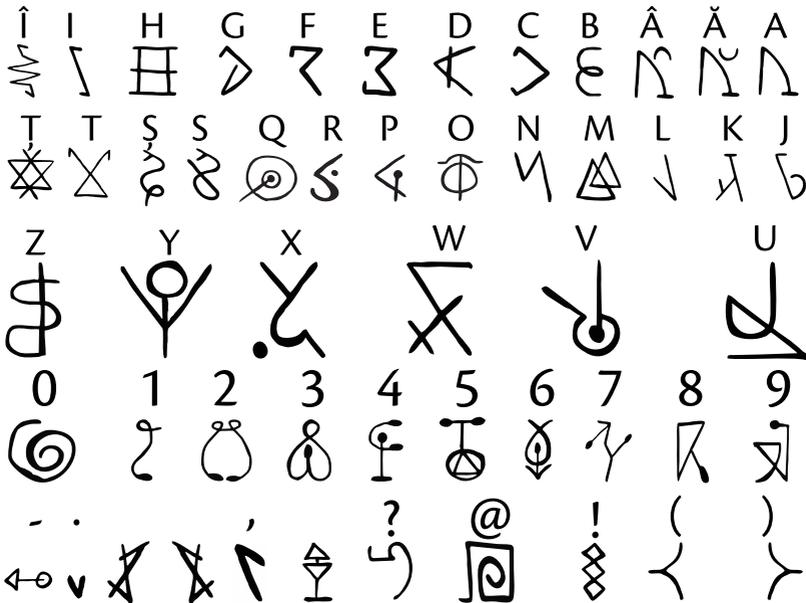
Suddenly, from the top left corner of the cupboard, a voice is heard:

-Ion, it's me, Professor Arion. I set up this surveillance camera with a microphone and speaker in your room to observe and monitor the conversations you will have with the library manager when he visits you. So don't be scared. I'm not spying on you. It has a start and stop button. It's there, do you see it? Keep the camera charged all the time and activate it when the manager visits you. I'm out. We'll talk.

- Good, Mr. Professor.

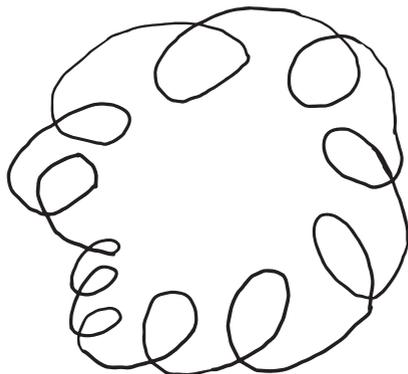


Ion had pondered whether he made the right choice in allowing the library manager to photograph the AEIOU drawing, even though he didn't mention the connection between several overlapping drawings and the link between them. He took out a set of colored pencils and a notebook from the cupboard, looking at the AEIOU drawing, at the character with a spiral on its head, noticing a strange alphabet surrounding that character by overlaying the drawing with the devil highlighted in the photograph he had taken of the two drawings. The letters seemed nonsensical but bore an incredible resemblance to the letters of the ancient language alphabet found on the note brought by the crow when he discovered the drawing, and which he had known for a long time. Looking closely at that note, Ion transcribes each letter onto paper, giving them a clear meaning and deciphering the mystery of this alphabet to read it more easily.



The crow made its appearance again. It flew to Ion's balcony, entering the studio. There, it flew onto the cupboard, where Ion's found drawing was positioned face up, gathering dust on the glass covering it. It approached the framed drawing on the cupboard. The crow, with its long beak, drew a line through the dust on the glass of the drawing, creating a fluidity similar to a spiral but with different spatial perspectives. Afterward, it took flight out the window.

Ion had seen the crow but remained silent, carefully observing its actions. After it took flight, the artist gently took the framed drawing from the cupboard and, in the light, noticed the line in the dust made by the crow's beak on the glass of the drawing.



- Are you here, Professor? asked Ion. Did you manage to observe what happened?

- Yes, artist, I saw. Please try not to wipe the dust off the drawing. I would like to see which elements it has encircled, Professor Arion's voice came from the speaker of the camera mounted on the cupboard. I see that you, too, have remained very attentive to details. Let me tell you something, Ion. It is extremely important to look around you and observe all the details, and when an object moves, know its place, but also make connections with the symbols and certain elements in the drawing to give the prophecy a continuity.

- Prophecy, Professor?

- Yes, Ion. That drawing is magical. Literally. You should hide it from the eyes of the world until it is revealed.

Ion took a pencil and paper, and accurately drew the line in the dust created by the crow, to have a reference in his study on this matter, then placed the paper next to the drawing.

- Don't lose that sketch, said the professor. Ion, what date were you born?

- January 7th, Professor.

- Do you know what date is in the religious calendar? It's the birth of Saint John the Baptist.

- I know, Professor. I can't drink twice; I do it once and well, Ion said, laughing.

The artist stops the speaker-equipped camera on the cupboard, dresses warmly, as it's November, and heads to the printing house where he sent for the printing of 50 copies of the game he invented, "The City Game." It is an educational game that promotes mathematics while narrating the objectives of the city in his hometown, also serving as an exceptional tourist product. Arriving at the printing house, he asks if they have started printing this game, but sadly, he learns that despite paying in full, it hasn't been produced even after seven months since he sent all the files to those people. They replied that it is not a priority for them, but it was for Ion.

While heading home, the phone rings. It was Radu, Ion's best friend, an exceptional archaeology doctor, with whom Ion can share every hidden thought without hesitation.

- Hi Radu. I want us to meet for a walk and a chat. As usual. See you at the fountain at 8:00 PM.

- Okay, replied Radu.

Ion arrives home and sits in bed, resting for a few hours, until before the meeting with Radu. He wakes up, gets dressed, and goes out, heading to the fountain. There, Radu awaits him, coming towards him, shaking his hand.

- You know I'll have an exhibition? said Ion.

- Yes, I heard. I'll be there. I hope many people will come or at least the right ones.

- It will be presented by the manager of the Cultural Center. It is an honor for me that he accepted this.

- You're one of them, why wouldn't they accept? said Radu, and together with Ion, they headed through the citadel towards the Obelisk, passing by the two cathedrals.

As they walked, Ion told Radu:

- Radu, I know we haven't talked at all these days, but I want to tell you something very important, even though it's unbelievable.

- I'm listening, said Radu.

Ion tells him in the smallest detail what has been happening to him for the past few days and notices Radu's skepticism. Later, he moves directly to the subject that interested him in this story, namely the appearance of the crow in certain ancient inscriptions, specifically from the Roman era of the 1st-4th century since Radu specialized in Roman history and could certainly provide important clues in his



searches about that cult of the sun, Sol Invictus.

- Ion, I know there are two temples related to Sol Invictus, one was discovered across from our famous college, and another was never discovered, although all the elements found by the Museum related to this cult are inscriptions in stone that deify the god Mithras. I found a bronze object that highlights Sol, in the form of a portrait with sun rays. I don't know what it is, but you can come to my office to see it.

The two had gone up to Radu's office, who took the object out of a bag, showing it to Ion.

- The crow in biblical mythology was the first messenger released from Noah's ark. It also has religious significance, but related to Sol Invictus; the crow, in the Roman period, was discovered as the emblem of a family, said Radu.

- Interesting, said Ion, looking at the mysterious object on Radu's desk. Allow me to take a photo of it.

- Sure, but please don't make it public.

- As you wish, said Ion, setting up the camera and taking several photos of the mysterious object.



- It's a very interesting piece, Radu, what do you think it is?
- I tend to believe it's an artifact.
- Radu, as you can see, on the surface of this object, there is a portrait with some sun rays behind its head. I think it's more of a Sol Invictus coin that has been hammered and transformed into a pendant. That's why it has a hole in the middle. It has too many similarities with other found coins. Saying this, Ion placed his fingers on the object, closed his

eyes, and in his mind, he could visualize an arched entry, brick walls, and the corner of a solid wooden table. Who first touched this object?

- I don't know, a worker I collaborated with on the site where we found it.

- Can't we find him?

- Unfortunately, no.

- Radu, I registered at a London bookstore, where I found a book written in 1911, stating that Sol Invictus were the protective guardians of the 13th Gemina Legion. How can priests be protective guardians of a legion if they didn't use spells and magic?

- You're right, but I don't believe in things like that, said Radu, putting the piece back in the drawer where he took it. Besides, what you read about this is old; since then, many more things have been discovered, and technology has advanced.

- It's true, but very little is found about this cult. This makes me wonder, especially since they dealt with prophetic matters, indirectly related to the AEIOU drawing. Moreover, I remember once being in the sea, and a thin snake-shaped bracelet clung to my leg. I lost it immediately, but I believe that because I touched it after so much time first, it conveyed something special to me, through which I could create those drawings I told you about, which together bring immortality and tell about the future.

- Caius Nummius Amandus is the one who built the Sol Invictus Mithras temple in Alba Iulia; they performed ceremonies honoring destiny deities, said Radu. They were very mysterious. This cult was highly appreciated by merchants of that time, from slaves to senators, which I think implies strong arguments towards the afterlife as the rulers of this world, arousing everyone's interest through prophecies that have not yet been discovered or from existing inscriptions in the world. But the relationship between Sol Invictus and the raven is very interesting, as in Greco-Roman mythology, Ahura Mazda sent a raven as the sun's messenger to teach Mithras to kill the bull. The name Ahura Mazda is literally translated as the lord of wisdom. Many invoked him in ceremonies, maintaining cosmic reality, preventing it from becoming chaos and ensuring what is true or just in the existence of the divine order. This ritual was only done in the morning. Saying this, Radu and Ion headed towards the Obelisk.

- Thank you, Radu, I'm sure you'll help me unravel the mystery of the drawings and decipher all the hidden aspects of these things.

Arriving at the Obelisk, Ion lights a cigarette.

- You used to say you'd quit, Radu said. You'll never succeed. For that, you need a good psychologist, Ion.

- Or a woman to motivate me.

- Of course.

- At that moment, a raven appears in the sky with a loud caw echoing from above.

- Look, Radu, that's the raven, Ion said, pointing to the beautiful bird with his finger.

- Do you really want me to believe you?

At that moment, Ion takes some berries out of his brown pocket and reaches his hand into the air, allowing the raven to come and perch on his hand. The raven glides gently onto Ion's hand, and he strokes its crest, bringing the hand with berries to its black beak, watching it eagerly peck, telling Radu that his relationship with this raven has only been a few days since the story began with that drawing from the year 806, which the artist named AEIOU. Suddenly, it started raining heavily. The two took shelter under the third gate of the fortress. The raven had disappeared.

- At first, when you told me what happened, I didn't believe you, but now this raven situation has become credible in your story, Radu said, especially, as you know, here in this city are the graves of the Corvin family. The very name carries the raven's name. Maybe it has nothing to do with what's happening to you; I'm just making connections.

- Remember, Radu, the portrait I drew of you?

- Yes, what about it?

- Professor Arion told me that the eyes of that portrait can transition between the real world and the world of spirits.

- Don't believe all that nonsense, Ion.

- But what if it's true?

- It can't be true. You die, and that's it. Everything's over. Especially since I know you had some issues. Are you okay now?

- Yes, I'm fine. Saying that, the two headed home after the rain stopped.

At home, Ion prepares some food, then selects drawings for his personal exhibition organized by the Cultural Center to send to the printing house, to be framed and exhibited later. There were a few days left until the opening. Emotions overwhelmed his entire body and mind because it was his first solo exhibition.

The next day, sitting and working at his desk, Ion receives some tasks for the national day and delves into his work. At one point, the raven appears at the office window, holding a scarf in its claws. Ion approaches the raven, but it takes flight to the workplace parking lot, where it releases the scarf onto the vegetation behind Ion's parked car, and disappears.

- Strange, Ion said. A silk scarf symbolizes romance. That's probably what the raven wanted to convey to me. I need to focus, Ion said and entered the office, where he immersed himself in work with the institution's manager.

Ion reads an email from Vera, a pianist with great talent who prefers classical music and plays according to well-defined rules containing a universal language that shines through the musician if done correctly. Ion knew she had a concert, being invited by the Cultural Center to the Roman-Catholic cathedral, where he could observe the speed with which her hands slid over the piano keys, which impressed him.

In that email, she thanked the Center for the invitation to play in that concert, something that impressed Ion, looking for her on an internet social network to make her a portrait as a thank you for the wonderful concert she offered at the invitation of the Center's manager. After a few hours, Ion draws the portrait of the pianist and posts it on the social network, along with a carefully crafted and deeply profound poem.

Your blond hair, like ripe wheat
Feeds the spirits of all gazes.
The sound of your keys
Freezes spectators in their dark hiding places
And brings forth a harmony
That not many understand.
Long-lost happiness
Wraps a ray of hope
That you will embrace with love
And won't let go
Until the moment of death.



After a few minutes, Ion receives a message from Vera, expressing her admiration for the drawing and poem, stating that she feels Ion's mood very vividly.

- I sense your sadness, how my thoughts fly towards you but touch an invisible barrier that blocks all feelings, returning without hope of bringing anything to stir my happiness like your ideas and what you feel for someone you've never met or seen but have the impression you've known for a lifetime, Ion replies to the beautiful woman's message, placing the painted acrylic portrait from 2004, representing a woman from one of his dreams, next to Vera's photograph, noticing the similarities and thinking he has finally found her. The resemblance was so great that he couldn't imagine Vera could actually be the Limping Singer from his dreams. I know that when the heart cherishes words of love, your talent will come out more pronounced, having the possibility to create masterpieces of love, I know that, I don't want to ask from where, but I know. I have always been like this, Ion thought out loud.

While thinking this, Ion receives another text message from Vera:

- Love is the greatest thing on earth, even if you deny it. Love reveals the best sides of a person, gives the power to create and live. It's like the sun.

- Incredible! Ion exclaimed. This woman read my thoughts. I need to know who she is; I need to figure out her destiny here in my time. Saying this, Ion writes a message to Vera:

- I feel you're a bit lost, maybe it's a bit much to express these words, but your facial expression says a lot. As an artist, I managed to read you and realized this aspect.

After a few hours of conversation, Ion realizes that this pianist likes him a lot, entering into intimate details, learning that she is married to one of his colleagues.

- Yes, I was sure things had to be complicated. That's how it is in every true love. It can never be easy, but I have to be very discreet with this woman. It's a bit hard because I am a very transparent and honest person. I hope not to create any problems.

Very excited about his new friend, Ion continues to talk with this person, eventually confessing their love for each other, and she expresses a particular pleasure to attend Ion's personal graphic exhibition, which is just around the corner, in two days to be exact.

Assisted by his colleagues in setting up the works on panels in the exhibition space of the third gate of the fortress, the exhibition was ready for the world to see. Ion was supported by all the written press in the city, which advertised the exhibition poster and published a press release sent by the artist on all social networks.

The opening reception arrived, where the Cultural Center manager spoke beautifully in front of all the invited guests. Ion, in conclusion, gifted a poetry plaque written by himself to all attendees, personally autographing each one. While speaking at the opening of the exhibition, Ion's eyes met Vera's, who, after finishing her speech, disappeared. The artist's mother was extremely impressed, with tears in her eyes from emotions.

It was a significant achievement for Ion, who was congratulated by everyone present at the opening, including a senator and his wife, as well as the president of the County Council, and other important people from his hometown.

Back home, Ion went to his room and started creating the Magus game, a card game with rules based on the calculation principle of the City Game. He accessed the internet and visited the London bookstore, gathering documents related to numerology, as he designed it to be an oracle that tells a story based on the number at the end of the game round, having a special meaning and symbolism for the one who acquired it through the final score. He couldn't help but think about the famous sad pianist, who confessed that she had problems with her husband. On the other hand, he didn't want to get involved, but he supported her passionately and with friendship in every message. Ion took out his phone and called Vasu:

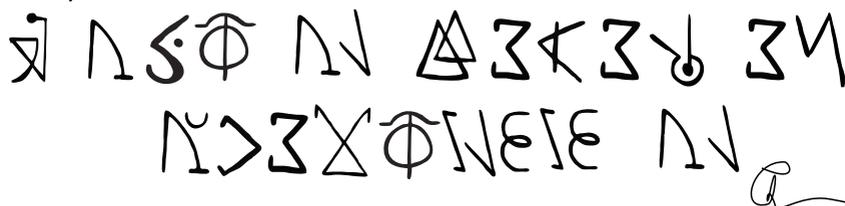
- Hello? Hi Vasu, how did you tell the manager of the old library where I live?

- He came to me and treated me to something to drink. So I trusted him and told him. I also taught him the Old Language, the language we used to speak when we were kids.

- I understand. Are you up for a few glasses of wine? I would like to test a game I invented. It's called Magus. It's an oracle.



It's morning. Ion wakes up and notices a note on his desk written in the Old Language that only he understands or thought he was the only one who understands it. However, he was mistaken because the note bears the signature of the manager of the old city library.



"We'll meet at 9 at the library."

After preparing breakfast, the artist's mother tells Ion that she found this note in the mail and brought it to him. Ion thanks her and gets dressed to go to the old city library to meet the library manager. Arriving there promptly at nine, Ion knocks on the manager's door, hearing a voice from inside:

- Come in, Ion! We've been expecting you.

Ion enters the manager's office, noticing that the manager has printed the AEIOU drawing on the wall at a large size, with many stickers written and attached to its surface.

- You might be wondering how I know the alphabet of the old language, the manager said.

- Yes, I'd love to know, Ion said. I see that you've thoroughly studied the AEIOU drawing. Did you call me to explain what it's about?

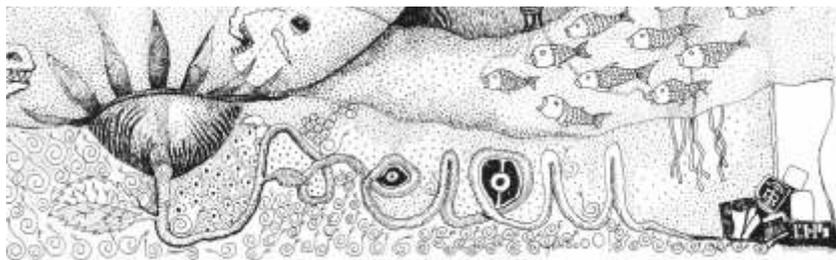
- Certainly! First of all, I want to congratulate you on the wonderful graphic exhibition you had.

- Thank you!

- The old language alphabet is also mentioned in the Codex, which I have studied, and I managed to make a connection with the letters from the note the crow brought you, based on the photograph of that note that I took when you showed it to me. This way, I understood the entire alphabet.

- Interesting. You don't have to hide things from me. You know from Vasu.

- Yes, that's true, the library manager said, smiling. But what's more interesting is what I discovered in this drawing, Ion. Please, have a seat facing the drawing, and I'll explain. There are many things to analyze, especially the connections and links within the content.



- As you can see, in the bottom left corner of the drawing, there are the initials of your name, a clear indication that you were right, and indeed, this drawing was created by you. From that signature, a stem emerges, creating a flower from which the letters AEIOU can be deciphered. I guess that's what this drawing is called.

- Yes.

- This drawing has biblical connotations because it is said that in the beginning was the word, as written in the Gospel of John, exactly in the missing pages of the Codex Cenannensis, created during the same period as the one belonging to this library. AEIOU are the human vowels, without which the word cannot exist, and consequently, communication. That's where this drawing begins to be read. And if I look at it as a whole, I can see that it is divided into three parts. The left part refers to the afterlife and the world of spirits, the central part of the drawing refers to the beginning of this world, and the upper part tells the story of the end. Yes. Apocalypse. And the section on the right side speaks about the current society and its path toward the future. It's an incredible drawing, Ion.

- I know, Mr. Cristian.

- What is interesting is that the illustrations are read from right to left, like writing in the Arabic alphabet. So there is a possibility that it is connected to that sun cult discovered in this city, Sol Invictus, and the Persian god Mithras, who emphasized in their ideology the concept of reincarnation. Persian writing is also done from right to left, only numbers are read like in the Latin alphabet, from left to right. That's how I managed to decipher the alphabet of the ancient language, with the help of Vasu, of course.

- Incredible, Mr. Cristian!

- Yes, Ion. It is incredible. Allow me to describe it further. But before doing that, I want to ask you if that crow has contacted you again.

Ion hesitates for a moment, thinking whether to tell the manager about the drawing made by the crow with its beak on the dust of the original glass, and says, Yes, Mr. Cristian. The crow came back, telling me about the action it took with its beak on the drawing's glass.

- Magic! I would like to see those spirals, artist. Many stories can be linked because of those loops.

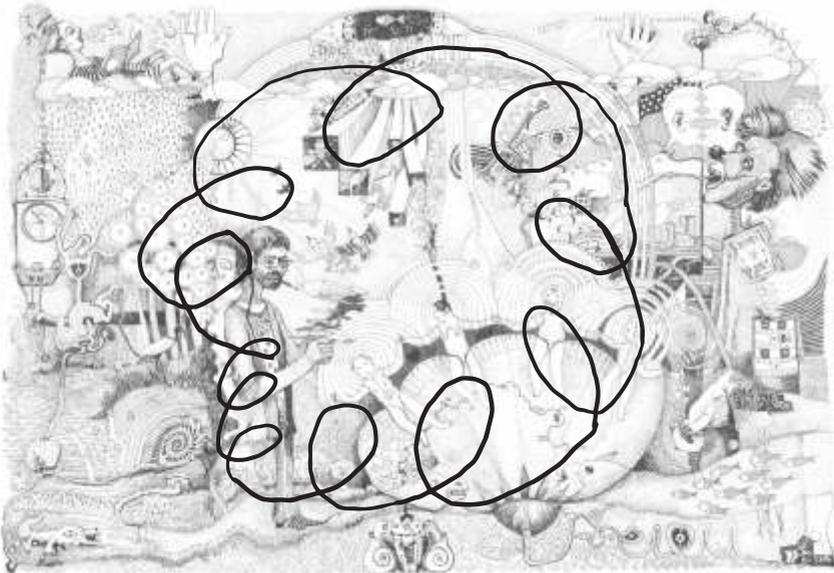
- Of course. I'll run home and bring the sketch and the drawing, as I've drawn it to actual size.

- I'll be waiting.

Ion gets up from his chair and runs home, where he takes the sketch with the lines created by the crow, then returns with them to the library manager.

- Here they are, Ion says, handing the sketch and his drawing to Cristian.

Cristian takes both drawings and places them on a transparent table with a light underneath, carefully following where the crow circled sections in the drawing.



- Perfect. I am convinced that the crow drew from left to right.

- Indeed, Ion said, watching the library manager closely.

- I see that four circles from the crow's spiral are drawn on the Lame Singer and the creator. Where did the crow start drawing?

- From the Sun.

- Yes. As I observe, it circled a black bird. It's the crow flying towards the sun, and the line continues into the spirit world, touching the head of a woman materializing from that dimension into the real world, merging with the creator, into his soul, descending gently towards the elbow of the right hand, later towards the pubic area of this woman.

- Mr. Manager Cristian, you met Mr. Arion when you came to me. I would like you to talk to him. He is an expert in interpretations and symbolism, and above all, he possesses another drawing from the six that form the sacred spell. I trust you. You have proven to be someone I can rely on.

- I like mysteries, Ion. But above all, these drawings are missing from a very valuable Codex. I have a proposal. Would you like us to secure this original AEIOU drawing in the library's safe? It will be safe with me.

- Yes. But I need a copy with the same dimensions before that. For study.

The library manager takes the AEIOU drawing, scans it, then prints it on the printer and hands it to Ion.

- Here you go.

- But Mr. Cristian, I need the Lame Singer. If I leave the drawing here, she won't be able to appear.

- You're right. That's not a good idea. Keep it, but take care of it like your own eyes. And regarding Professor Arion, I would like to meet him.

- He would be pleased, although I'm not sure how much trust he might have in you.

- Trust is earned. Just like you earned it. If we continue the line on the drawing, we can see that it leads to the tree of immortality. This tree is located in the section that refers to the passage of time and beginnings, held by one of the four people who govern the world; they are immortal. But I also see a clock with the open lid, on which there is a cross on either side of the lid, facing up and down. I think we need Professor Arion for interpretations. Can you call him and ask him to come here when he can? If possible, bring the drawing too.

- Yes, I'll call him now.

Ion dials the professor's phone number, frozen with emotions on the chair in front of the drawing, staring at it.

- Hello? Good day, Mr. Arion, it's Ion. I called you because I'm in the office of the manager of the old city library, with the AEIOU drawing printed large on the entire wall. Mr. Cristian has made some colossal discoveries and would like to discuss with you certain symbols related to the drawing. Can you come to the library to his office? If you can, please bring the devil's drawing with you.

- Hello, Ion. I'll be there in half an hour, the professor said, and hung up the phone.

After half an hour, the professor appeared in Cristian's office, carrying the drawing that Ion called the Gate of Hell under his arm.

- Welcome! Mr. Professor, said Cristian. Would you like some coffee?

- Yes, thank you. Without sugar, please.

- Mr. Professor, there are only a few people who know how to read the Old Language. One of them is a childhood friend of Ion's, who unfortunately is an alcoholic. I got him to talk last night, and he taught me how to read this alphabet. The Lame Singer understands this language, but she is a specter, so it would be just me and our artist.

- Why are you telling me this? Professor Arion asked.

- Because, with Ion's permission, we would like to teach you how to read it too.

- Of course, I have absolutely no problem with that, Ion says.

- So, Mr. Professor, if you look at this alphabet in the cursive order of the letters from A to Z, you can see a similarity with the Latin alphabet of our native language. Saying this, Cristian shows Mr. Arion the sketch of the alphabet drawn by Ion.

- That's right, they are relatively similar, and the letters that don't resemble can be deciphered based on the cursive nature of the normal alphabet.

- Yes, Mr. Professor, but here's the interesting part. When something is written in this Old Language, the entire text is written in reverse, from right to left, respecting our language's speaking and writing.

- I brought the gate key tied with a book string, Ion. Have you explained to Cristian how it works?
- Not yet, although it only works between two people, Mr. Professor.
- Yes, I know, but maybe he wants to see it...
- See whom? the library manager asked.
- The Lame Singer! they both exclaimed.

Professor Arion explains to the library manager what needs to be done for the appearance of the Lame Singer, from whom they could get more answers to the mysteries discovered in the drawing. Ion and Cristian touch the drawings and the key in a similar manner to how Ion did it with the professor. After a short time, the entire atmosphere in the manager's office turns blue, and the Lame Singer from the AEIOU drawing appears.

- My God, you're so beautiful! exclaimed Cristian.
- I'm glad to meet you, said the Lame Singer. I'm here to answer your questions. As you can see, I can speak your native language, only in the dream where I am, with you here. In my world, this language is entirely unknown, only the alphabet of the Old Language exists.
- Please tell me, Lame Singer, what does that continuous loop line drawn by the crow with its beak on the drawing's glass, in the dust, symbolize?
- First, you've noticed that the line is continuous, like an Ouroboros snake.
- Ouroboros represents infinity and rebirth, said Cristian.
- Yes, that's correct, replied the Lame Singer, and the loops are a very clearly defined narrative, starting from the crow flying towards the sun to the destruction of this world through time. As you can see, that stem forms petals that simultaneously create four characters in a single line, and on the surface of this flower, there is a timeline with highlighted years. That line starts from a large generator, held by two snails, which has a reference to the particle generator built under Geneva, CERN.

As the Lame Singer narrates, Cristian repeats what she says so that Professor Arion can take notes.

- But why does that timeline end in the mouth of that fish? the professor asks.
- As you can see, inside that fish are smaller fish, feeding from a vessel containing a stem on its surface, on which a water droplet can be seen, and going up, two human faces facing each other, representing

individual manipulation. If we continue up that stem, at its end, there is a princess holding a snail, who shouts into the synapse of the brain of a blind and sick clown, who coughs pigs. Above the last drawn pig, the symbol of a virus can be seen, which, if studied carefully through the points scattered around it, spreads throughout the city and the world.

- It's incredible how current it is! exclaimed the professor.

- You haven't seen anything, said the Lame Singer. If you carefully observe the reading from right to left, you can see the decrease of this virus through the representation of a barrier, and beyond this barrier, the symbols of the scythe and the hammer. Exactly what followed after the pandemic we all went through, through Russia's military operation.

- This drawing is a true prophecy that accurately describes the events happening now, said Cristian, listening further to what the singer tells.

- Perhaps we should interpret the two drawings in the section described from the current reality, Professor Arion says. I forgot to mention that these overlays are very important, Mr. Manager.

- Of course, but before that, I would like to ask the Singer another question. What comes after this war in Russia?

- It's hard to tell you that, Mr. Manager, but as highlighted in the drawing, after this crisis is resolved, the drawing shows that something will fall from the sky, connecting with the character associated with the spiritual side, where there is an overlay with the head of the patriarch held by the devil. Most likely, some drones flying in the sky, or something toxic will fall to the ground, because, as you can see, there are rooms with animals and people, but in the room where the child is, it seems to be safe and protected inside, as he smiles. So, something might happen that will force us to stay indoors, or adults will be killed. What is strange is that death descends from that cloud, highlighted by the overlay of these drawings representing the broken horn of the devil, which the angel in the right part of the drawing uses to split a tied woman. It might be about a judgment day, but in that perimeter, the electricity seems to stop, returning to classic communication.

- Thank you, Lame Singer. But by what procedure do you manage to time travel through a dream to meet us?

- Because I own two drawings created by Ion from the year I come from. One is this drawing, AEIOU. I'll tell you how Ion can come here to see it and reproduce it in your world on the third one. But another time. I'm

exhausted; I need to return to my world.

Ion and Cristian put down the book with the key and string, and the Lame Singer becomes invisible, reappearing again in the AEIOU drawing.

- So it's very clear what needs to be done, said the library manager. Have you timed how long until the Lame Singer is exhausted, Professor?

- Yes. In five hours from the appearance of the Lame Singer, we need to gather very important data. Probably, it will take just as long to gather information after you travel through this dream osmosis to the year 806, Ion. I tend to believe that twenty minutes in our world is equivalent to five hours in the dream world. It remains only for you to meet her tomorrow and find out how you can travel. Generally, dreams that are remembered are those dreamt in the morning. But I think it was enough for today. Let's go, now that we've become friends, to visit the changing of the guard ceremony at the Third Gate of the Citadel.

- Good idea, said Ion.

The three of them dressed and left the library, heading to the changing of the guard ceremony. An exceptional show filled with an audience, very well-directed, in the spirit of the 18th-century Habsburg monarchy. After the ceremony, the three went down the city gates, heading towards the Cultural Center.



Once at the Center, Ion enters his office with the two guests, taking two poetry plaques he wrote from the cupboard, giving them as gifts to the professor and the library manager, with his autograph.

- Mr. Cristian, I left the drawings and tools in your office. What time shall we meet tomorrow?

- Three o'clock is perfect.

- How do you find time for everything you do, Ion? the surprised professor asks.

- I work quite fast, and the time I have left, I use for other personal matters, but I try to make them useful for society.

- Why are we at the Cultural Center now?

- Because I want to show you something, Ion replies to Cristian.

Ion opens the drawer of the office, takes two metal coins with his engraved face, saying:

- This coin named PORE is created in a limited number of only twenty copies. I want it to be the currency of the future in culture, education, and art.

- Beautiful, exclaimed Professor Arion.

- Yes, replied Ion, and I also created it as a virtual token on the blockchain system. The current value is very low, and the total number is one million units. I would like to use it as a transaction currency for the City Game, a game focused on simple mathematical calculations, which is also an educational and tourist product, promoting the citadel in my hometown. I submitted the documentation for its registration as a patent and a registered trademark.

- Very clever, Cristian responds.

- I give you these coins as a gift. Only people I consider very close friends have them.

- Thank you, replied Cristian and Mr. Arion. We will cherish them in a special way.

- If you want to play the City Game with three players, I have the trial copy that I printed at the printing house, and we can relax. On this occasion, you will also learn the rules of the game.

- We would be delighted, Ion.

Ion takes the City Game from the drawer and unfolds it on the room's table, starting to play a round with the two important guests.

- The rules are simple, says Ion. There are these six beautifully illustrated cards with numbers from two to seven. They will be shuffled, and each

of us will receive two cards. Saying this, Ion distributes the cards on the main game card platform, saying that the youngest will turn over one card first and attack another of the opponents.

- I turn over a card, says the library manager. Saying this, he turns over the card with the number seven, choosing to turn over a card of his choice from the opponents, which turns out to be the numbers five for Ion and three for Professor Arion.

- Excellent, says Ion. The largest number is declared the winner. But how many points will it win? Now the difference between the numbers will be made: $7-5 = 2$, that means Mr. Cristian wins two points from my card, and $7-3 = 4$. And five points from Professor's card. After the subtraction is done, the addition will be made immediately to see how many points he has accumulated. So $5 + 2 = 7$. Mr. Cristian won seven points in this battle.

- It's a wonderful game, Ion, says the library manager. I won this game battle. Beginner's luck.

- I'm glad you like this game. My car is in the Cultural Center parking lot. Let me take you home, says Ion, driving the guests to the car, taking them to their homes, later going home.

Back home, Ion felt the absence of the AEIOU drawing, but he told himself that it's not too long until the next day. He opens his computer and enters his video game where he created a virtual cultural space to relax. After a few minutes, the phone rings. It was Vasu.

- Ion, I have news. I quit drinking. I don't want to hear about alcohol anymore.

- I'm glad to hear that, Vasu. How about a beer?

- Yes! Where do we meet?

- "At the Stolen Saber" in 20 minutes?

- Perfect. See you there.

They named this location "At the Stolen Saber" because in the ditches of the citadel where Ion meets Vasu for beer, there is a statue of an Austro-Hungarian soldier with a rifle missing its bayonet.

- Hi Vasu, I got four bottles, as usual. It's nice outside. I want to tell you something very important. When you taught the library manager to read the Old Language alphabet, did he ask you anything else besides that?

- I don't remember, I was drunk. But I vaguely recall he asked where you keep your drawings. I have no way of knowing this.

- Odd.

- Are you reincarnated?

- It seems so. But more than that. I have a mission to accomplish. That's why I'm asking you to come with me to the library tomorrow when we meet Cristian to find out if he wanted to sabotage me.

- Please tell me what it's about, Vasu asks.

Ion tells Vasu everything in the smallest detail. He remains stunned, exclaiming that not even if he had smoked the strongest herbs would he have experienced such a thing.

- I have some herbs with me, Vasu said. It goes well with beer because it's not very strong, and the alcohol will enhance the effect.

- I don't smoke that stuff anymore, but thank you for thinking of it.

The two finished their beers and headed home, as it was getting quite late.

After a peaceful night, it's three minutes to three. Ion gets into the car with Vasu and heads to the meeting place. When they arrive at the manager's office, the two were already there, waiting for Ion, surprised by Vasu's presence.

- Good day, gentlemen. We have a new member on the team. Mr. Cristian already knows him. Isn't that right?

- Cristian was silent, convinced that Vasu had talked about the proposal he had made, trying to find a plausible excuse.

- You don't have to apologize, Mr. Cristian, Ion said. Your conversation with Vasu took place before we became friends and trusted each other. Everything is fine. Don't worry. We'll have to stay here until tomorrow morning, and I have to lie down on the couch in this office during my journey. But before that, let me invoke the Lame Singer to tell me how to travel through dreams.

Ion takes the AEIOU drawing out of the frame and touches the contours of the singer. She appears in front of him with a smile.

- Wonderful, I'm here. In my world, I have narcolepsy due to these travels to your world. That's why I have to be very careful where I go because a few times you called me while I was in the middle of the street. What time is it now in your world?

- Three and nine minutes.

- At five, I will call you through the AEIOU drawing. Please be ready.

- I will have only five hours to stay in the year 806. So, twenty minutes in my world is five hours in yours, and I need to study to understand the third drawing from the Codex. This means that in an hour and forty

minutes, call me, swallowing two sleeping pills and lying down on the couch, falling into a deep sleep after touching the *Lame Singer* for her to appear again in the drawing, sending her back to her world.

Ion has fallen asleep, Professor. Now we just have to wait until we see the character from the AEIOU drawing representing him disappear. Then we'll know he's there, Cristian whispered to the professor. Vasu, please prepare three glasses of brandy from the bar. We'll need them.

The time has come. The character from the creator's drawing AEIOU had completely disappeared. Ion suddenly opened his eyes and realized he was in a wooden shack at the edge of a forest, lying on a straw bed. Next to him, as real as can be, the *Lame Singer* and himself, drawing the sketch the creator called the *Clone*. Ion knew he had no time to waste. He studies the drawing carefully, every line and content over the course of five hours after which Marius from the year 806 throws the original drawing into the fire, destroying it. Ion from 2022 reappears in the drawing, waking up.

- Did you achieve something? the professor asked curiously.
- Yes, please give me a pen with ink and a white sheet of paper.
- Here you go, the library manager hands him the requested items.

Ion starts drawing, working on that drawing for three days and nights without stopping, during which the manager, the professor, and Vasu brought food and drinks, watching every line drawn on the paper with ink, attentively.

- I've finished it. This is it. We already have three drawings, one from 806, one from 2003, and this one from 2022. The *Clone* drawing was destroyed in 806, thrown into the fire by the author, by me. Surely we will find clues that will tell us where to find the fourth drawing. What is terrifying is that it's me from this world, drawn on a page of a destroyed Codex.

- With talent like yours, we can certainly discover the others, Vasu said, taking another sip of brandy, then sitting on the couch in the manager's office, taking a sketchbook from his bag, studying it carefully, following a pertinent dialogue with those present.





Vasu tells the gentlemen that there might be another element besides drawings; it could be a song composed by the Lame Singer and Ion during the ritual. And as nothing happens by chance, Ion even plays the flute, and this might be the connection between the two. But for this to be possible, Ion needs to obtain a musical score he played, and someone with expertise has to put it on sheet music. Preferably the woman from the acrylic painting he dreamed of and painted, Vera, because she is a famous pianist and is the reincarnation of the Lame Singer.

- You might be perfectly right, Vasu, the library manager said. But what will happen when the incantation and this ritual are complete? That's what I fear the most. It could be devastating for humanity; the sky might merge with the earth, time might dilate, or those of us involved might gain immortality. Something significant will definitely happen; otherwise, I can't explain how these drawings were so well hidden in time and space, especially since the remaining ones disappeared in the 11th century. So, there were certainly only five back then.

- That's why I'm here, Professor Arion said. To find the meaning of these drawings through their symbolism and interpretations. Thanks to them, we will know what will happen and how we should act. Until then, Ion, try to get in touch with the pianist you told me about. Vera. And here's the devil drawing back. It belongs to you.

- Thank you. She's someone who understands me, Professor. I'm going to invite her to the city for the first time and explain the situation. Saying this, Ion took the AEIOU, the Clone, and the Hell Gate drawings, heading towards the exit of the institution.

The four friends parted ways, but Vasu and Ion stopped for a beer at "La vrăbiuța veselă."

- How did you come up with this idea, Vasu? It's quite plausible. But we won't know exactly until these drawings are interpreted. You're aware of that, aren't you?

- Yes. But it might be true. Keep me posted on everything you do.

Ion's phone rang, he answered, as it was his mother on the other end of the line.

- Where are you wandering? I haven't seen you for three days. I'm worried about you. Your phone was off.

- I'll be home in half an hour.

The two had their beer and headed home. When Ion got home, he put the three drawings in a folder on the cupboard and had the breakfast his mother prepared, starting to write a novel about everything that was happening. His mother came and saw him writing, saying she was impressed with her son's activities but would like Ion to rest more.

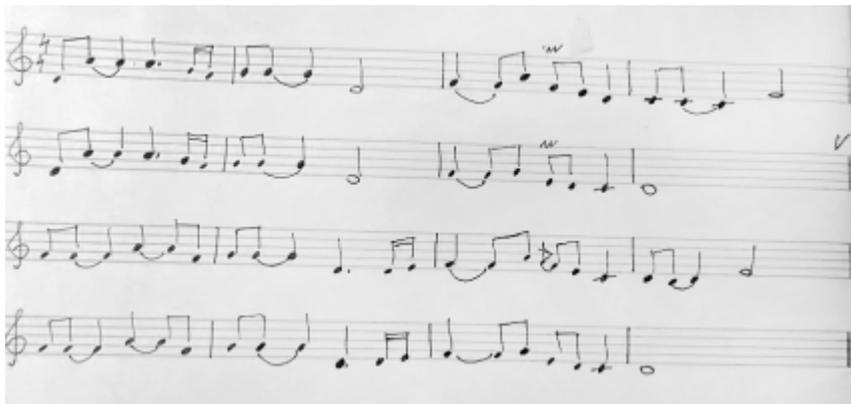
Ion dialed Vera's phone number, asking if she would like to go to the movies together. She accepted the invitation, and Ion bought two tickets online for 7:00 PM.

He took his flute out of the cupboard drawer, playing a medieval passage with modern influences emotionally, which he sent to Vera through a message. Very impressed with Ion's composition, she created a harmony after his musical passage, put it into sheet music, played it on the piano, recorded it, and sent it, writing:

- This is how your composed melody sounds, with the harmony played on the piano.

- It's incredible, Ion replied, then saved the piano sound and overlaid his flute on it, resulting in an incredibly harmonious short composition. He sent it to Vera, who listened to it, responding to his message:

- It's wonderful what has come out. We should compose together more than just this short musical passage. Saying this, Vera sends to Ion the score of the passage he composed.



- I would love to create a complete melody together, not just a passage.

Ion was convinced that this melody he had started was directly connected to the incantation needed during the ritual of the six drawings; it could even be the key to solving them. Moreover, the prophecy had already begun to take shape through their completion. Even though they had known each other for only a short time, he felt towards her as if the gods had brought her from the other world, and he had known her for a very long time, for centuries, for millennia. The thoughts he had about her returned to him through text messages, as if Ion were whispering out loud to Vera what he was thinking, and she immediately responded with that thought. They were connected. It was not known how, but they had such a tight bond with each other that they deeply felt they must have loved each other very much in another life. He felt her so close, like he had never felt anyone else in his entire life. He loved her. And she had an incredibly great talent, being a famous pianist with extrasensory senses. Their attraction was somewhat justified, but they had to be careful about the gossip of the people around them, which could harm their relationship greatly. To see how strange, they stumbled upon each other right here, in Ion's hometown. Maybe this is their destiny; maybe this prophecy of these drawings is actually about them, with the most likely explanation being that they were Adam and Eve in a previous world. Things are so complicated in this equation of these drawings that anything is possible.

At 6:40 PM, Ion got into his car, drove, and parked near the building where Vera lived, going together to the cinema. There, they were quite cautious and didn't hold hands so that no one they knew would notice. They sat in the reserved seats, watching the movie with bated breath. It was a sci-fi film. Meanwhile, the mayor appeared, asking Vera if there were seats available here and sitting behind them. She replied affirmatively. During the movie, Ion couldn't resist kissing her, even if someone might have seen them. He no longer cared that Vera was married. The only thing he cared about was what he felt for her.

There was one more day when the two could feel good together because Vera had to go home to her country to visit her mother for Christmas. Their love was so powerful that Ion thought he really wanted a child, to be a father. And that was also Vera's pleasure and desire.

After two days, Ion went to play a game of billiards with his friend Horia, whom he had known for a long time and who was friends with Vasu. After playing a few rounds, Horia told Ion that friends meant nothing to him. He then took out his phone and sent a message to Ion's boss asking if he wanted to talk about him. Ion got scared, unable to imagine how a good friend would want to harm him so much, spreading lies that could affect his career, realizing what the true betrayal of a friend meant. But he didn't truly realize this until the phone rang. It was Vasu.

- Hi Ion, can you buy something to drink, and we can go to a warm place?

- Of course. We can go anywhere, just not to your friend Horea. I removed him from my list of friends.

Vasu and Ion go to the store on the main street, where Ion buys four bottles of beer, which he gives to Vasu. Vasu finds a Christmas tree since it's Christmas Eve and calls Horea, telling him he's coming to his place to take him. Ion tells Vasu that he's waiting downstairs because he doesn't want to see Horea. However, after waiting for Vasu for twenty minutes, he calls him and says he can enjoy those beers peacefully with his friend, after which he heads home. During this time, he removes Vasu from his list of friends and blocks his phone number, realizing a very important aspect for his health, namely that he won't drink alcohol except on very special occasions and with moderation,

and that he will be very careful about the people he befriends in the future.

So, even though Vasu had been friends with Ion since childhood, he completely exited the equation, realizing what a great writer meant about friends: that throughout our lives, we have only three. One will leave us for a boyfriend or girlfriend, one will die, and one alone will remain.

Betrayal is the ugliest thing ever experienced, which can take many forms. Whether someone lies to you or when someone close talks badly about you without you knowing, when your partner cheats or lies, or when someone to whom you've told a secret reveals it. There are so many forms of betrayal, especially when someone gets under your skin to obtain valuable information or when you feel humiliated by someone. But for an artist, it is a great betrayal when someone steals your ideas and concepts and uses them to their advantage. This is what Ion feared the most.



Once home, Ion reflects on what happened and writes a poem about what he felt at that moment:

B FLAT

I would kiss your eyes, so you can feel my love
And you'll never reopen them
For fear of tossing my kiss beneath your eyelid.
I would kiss your forehead, so you can feel my affection
And you'll never wear a hat again
So as not to wipe away my kiss.
I would kiss your lips, so you can feel my desire
And you would die of thirst
To keep the taste from fading away.
I am your clay
From which you'll sculpt a work of art
Moistened by your saliva to give me shine
Cut by your gaze to give me form and content
Caressed by your hands to give me smoothness
And loved endlessly to give me value.
Carefully stored in the depths of your heart
Locked with 34 padlocks, one for each vertebra
Exhibited with gentleness and esteem in the well-deserved place
Every time your skin
Sweats droplets of love.
Anoint my heart with your laughter
Uncover my lost soul
And heal every lost wound
To fulfill your pleasure of gazing
At the most wonderful smile.
You bring the darkness I've always needed
To contrast the lines too bright
And to shape the image of a perfect world
That exists only in the soul
And our thoughts.
When I'm alone, I have the intimacy to talk
To myself.
But when I'm with you
I have the intimacy to speak to the entire universe.



And as each poem goes well with an illustration, Ion draws Vera's portrait, continuing the poem:

The sound of your applause flavors the morning coffee
Refreshing the room with the harmony of the yellow rose
 Stained by the blood spilled from love
Which colors all the edges of the petals in bright red
 Turning it into the most beautiful rose on earth.
 Its petals give off the most enticing aroma
 Enhanced by their harmony
 In a B flat chord

It's Christmas morning. The adorned Christmas tree in the living room exudes the freshness of sap, bringing a pure atmosphere to the room. Ion locks himself in his room and touches the lines of the AEIOU drawing to summon the limping Singer. She appears next to the artist exclaiming:

- No! I was in the middle of the Christmas festival with my husband, and you called me. He knows I have narcolepsy, so I am protected. I hope you have a very well-founded reason, my dear, if you summoned me.

- Yes, that's right. I do have a reason.

- What would that be? asks the limping Singer, looking at him curiously.

- I am, more precisely, your husband from 1216 years ago.

The Singer looks at Ion, smiling, and begins to dance in the room, telling him that she is extremely happy because, thanks to him, she has traveled through time, into the future, and met her beloved man. However, she would like to see what Vera looks like. Saying this, Ion shows the limping Singer Vera's portrait. She looks at it and exclaims:

- She is incredibly beautiful!

- Yes, that's true, says Ion. But in this world of mine, Vera has no idea what is happening. If I were to tell her, most likely, she would consider me crazy and wouldn't believe me.

- I know you invented a game, Ion. An oracle. You named it the Magician. You invented it in the year 806, but you didn't want to make it public because it was incredibly accurate. Did you happen to invent it in this world of 2022 as well?

- Yes! Just last month, I finished it and tested it with a friend who betrayed me, Ion said.

- Please tell me the rules, begged Ion, the limping Singer, because you never wanted to tell anyone about it from the year 806 out of fear, and you threw it into the fire after drawing it. But your genetic memory has been transmitted over time, and you remembered it now. Please help us change our future.

- Very strange. How similar, Singer. I've only made six copies now, and I threw one into the fire. The idea I had related to this was to send that copy to the otherworldly realm by making a pact with the devil, selling that copy through fire to gain reincarnation, both for me and you, with the same abilities from our previous life. I hoped to meet you again. Which has indeed happened, as you can see, through Vera.

- Yes! That's it! Now I remember. Because of this, Marius burns everything he considers precious in the year 806.

- My name is Marius there?

- Yes.

Saying this, Ion takes out the Magician game manual and lays it out on the table for the limping Singer to study which is written in the Romanian language.

Jocul MAGUL este un joc de matematică strategică și noroc cu 32 de cartonașe

1

Se amestecă și se împart în mod egal cartonașele pentru fiecare jucător cu fața în jos.

2

Jucătorul mai mic în vârstă începe primul și pune pe suprafața de joc o carte cu fața în sus.

3

cartonașul conține 4 elemente:

- a) PUTERE
- b) INFLUENȚĂ
- c) NUMĂR PRINCIPAL
- d) SIMBOL



INFLUENȚĂ

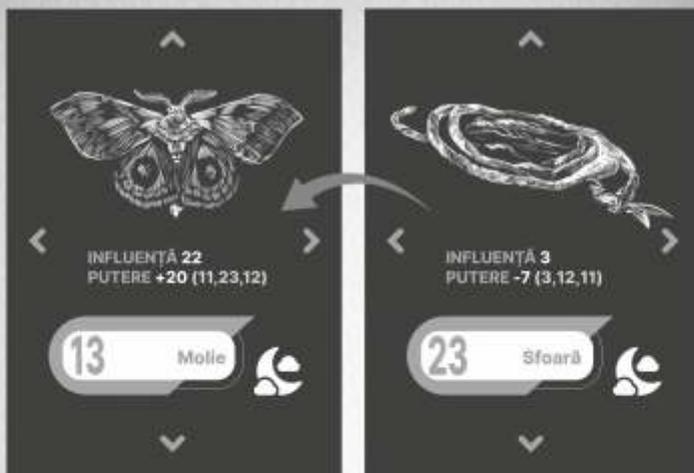
PUTERE

INDICE

NUMĂR PRINCIPAL

SIMBOL

După ce primul jucător a pus o carte jos, care este numărul 13, în ordinea inversă ceasornicului, al doilea jucător trage o carte din pachetul care-i aparține, și o pune lângă cartea adversarului în partea pozițiilor săgeților verzi din lateral. Să zicem că atacatorul are numărul 23. Precum vedeți, indicele numărului 13 este 11,23,12. Fiindcă numărul 13 are indexul 23 care corespunde numărului principal al atacatorului, îi va da o PUTERE de +20 de puncte transformând numărul 13 în 33, apărându-se de atacator, fiindcă numărul cel mai mare, câștigă. Dacă nu exista indexul 23 al cartonașului 13, atunci se făcea diferența de puncte: $23 - 13 = 10$ și cartonașul cu numărul 23 câștiga 10 puncte.



În cazul de față, cartonașul cu numărul 13 se apără de atacator (numărul 23), cu o valoare de 33 de puncte dobândită de pe urma indicelui cu galben ce corespunde cu numărul principal al atacatorului, adunându-se valoarea Puterii (+20) numărului principal 13. Fiindcă simbolul NOAPTE este prezent pe ambele cartonașe se va face diferența de puncte de la INFLUENȚĂ. Chiar dacă cartonașul se apără, se va face diferența de puncte de la numerele de influență ale celor două cartonașe și rezultatul se adaugă la punctajul principal al jocului. Punctele de INFLUENȚĂ se calculează doar în cazul în care simbolurile sunt similare.



Al treilea jucător pune o altă carte în partea săgeților verzi, atașând-o de celelalte cartonașe în funcție de numărul cel mai mic, ales de jucător. În cazul de față, numărul 24 atacă numărul 13, deoarece simbolurile și indicele cartonașelor nu corespund, nu se calculează numărul de INFLUENȚĂ, ci se calculează doar numerele principale.

(După regulamentul complet al acestui mod de joc, se va prezenta modul oracolului și metoda de distribuire a cartonașelor cu interpretările acestora.)



Fiindcă numărul 13 nu are indice de apărare, cartonașul cu numărul 24 câștigă 11 puncte.

$$24 - 13 = 11$$



Al patrulea jucător, întoarce un cartonaș special (MEMORIE). Datorită acestui cartonaș, ridică de pe suprafața de joc, celelalte două cartonașe conform săgeților cu verde și le pune deoparte în (CIMITIR). Dacă era doar un cartonaș în dreptul celui cu abilități, acel cartonaș se pune deoparte. De menționat că în pachetul de cartonașe sunt 4 cărți cu abilități, iar în momentul în care cartonașele care sunt puse deoparte, se vor adăuga punctele cartonașelor care au fost luate de pe suprafața de joc, la scorul principal. E de preferat să se folosească în dreptul cartonașelor cu numărul cel mai mare de pe suprafața de joc. Aceste cartonașe cu abilități sunt în număr de 4 și fiecare dintre ele îi corespunde un număr de puncte care se adaugă la scorul principal. În cazul de față, cartonașul (MEMORIE) adună $24+23+15=62$ de puncte care se adaugă scorului final.

Există două tipuri de cartonașe speciale. Cele de tipul celui văzut anterior (MEMORIE) și cele galbene, care au abilitatea de a atrage un cartonaș la alegere din cimitirul adversarului, punându-l în cimitirul jucătorului care îl folosește, adăugându-se punctele acestuia la scorul principal și de a captura cartonașele ale căror figuri geometrice corespund formației cu alb ale cartonașelor galbene.

5 puncte

10 puncte

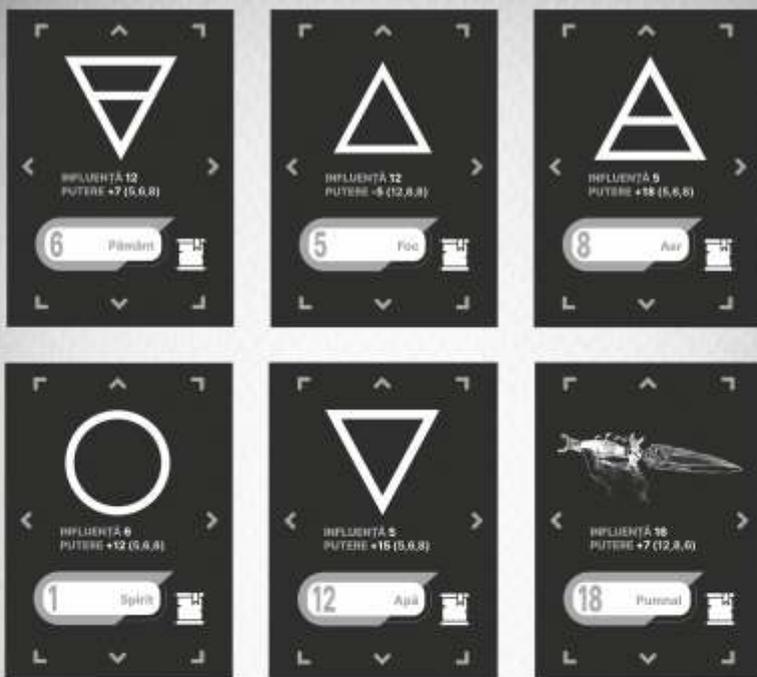
15 puncte

20 puncte





În exemplul din imaginea de mai sus, a fost folosit un cartonaș galben cu abilități, care are formația în cruce (pătrățelele cu alb de pe cartonașul galben), iar toate cele 6 cartonașe principale, inclusiv cel galben special, vor fi luate de pe suprafața de joc, și puse în CIMITIR (deoparte), iar abilitatea acestui cartonaș este de a alege o carte din cimitirul unui adversar la alegere, care-l avantajează pe jucător. De preferat un cartonaș având numărul cel mai mare, care se va adăuga scorului principal. Precum vedeți, cartea cu numărul 18 - pumnal are săgeată și pe diagonală, putând ataca cartea numărul 1 - spirit. În acest caz, având aceleași simboluri, se va ține cont și de numărul de INFLUENȚĂ. Număr principal: $18 - 1 = 17$ + INFLUENȚĂ: $16 - 6 = 10$. Se va aduna punctele obținute din cei doi factori de calcul și rezultatul final va fi: $17 + 10 = 27$. Deci cartonașul cu numărul 18 câștigă 27 de puncte.



De asemenea, în conținutul cartonașelor principale de joc, sunt 6 cartonașe care împreună formează vraja magului. Acestea sunt marcate cu semnul PERGAMENT 

Aceste cartonașe formează vraja completă a magului, doar când sunt câștigate toate în CIMITIR. Precum vedeți, au săgeți de acțiune și pe diagonală. Aerul și Pământul, dacă sunt jucate ca și cartonașe de atac sau de apărare, își dau singure puncte datorită indicelui cu același număr ca cel principal, folosindu-se puterea acestor cartonașe.

Când unul dintre jucători adună toate cartonașele de vrajă în CIMITIR, jocul este câștigat de către acel jucător fără să se termine runda de joc, anulându-se toate punctele deja acumulate de ceilalți jucători, iar jucătorul care a făcut vraja MAGULUI câștigă 500 de puncte.

Simbolurile cartonașelor principale de joc sunt denumite astfel:

PERGAMENT



LUMINĂ

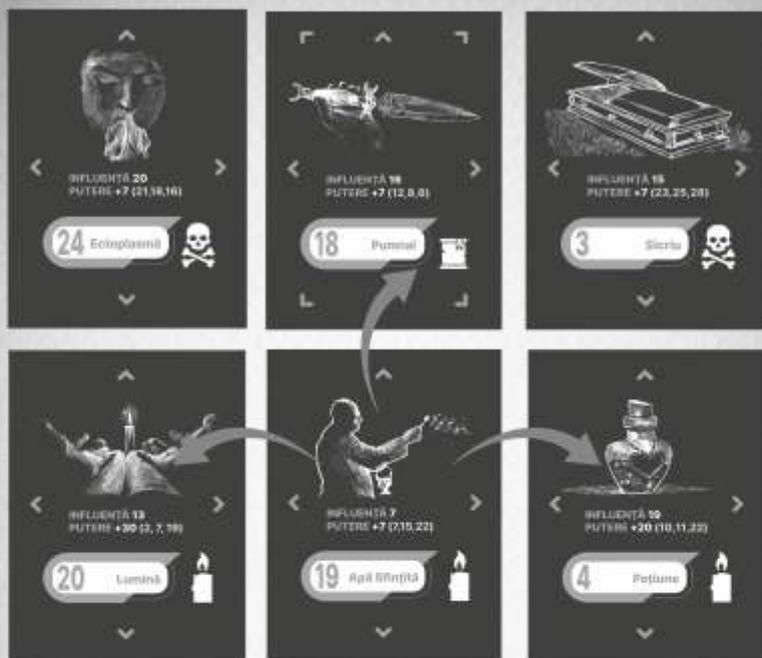


MOARTE



NOAPTE





ATACUL MAI MULTOR CARTONAȘE DE JOC SIMULTAN, CU UN SINGUR CARTONAȘ

Jucătorul poziționează cartonașul cu numărul 19 în spațiul liber, atacând cartonașele cu numerele 20, 4 și 18, respectând săgețile verzi care indică atacul pe laterale. Doar cartonașele de vrajă pot ataca și pe diagonală. Dar să vă explic în ce constă acest atac al cartonașului cu numărul 19. Prima dată, se privește indicele cu galben al fiecărui cartonaș, pentru a vedea dacă corespunde vreunui. În cazul de față doar numărul 20 are numărul 19 în indice, dar fiind o carte care se apără, nu câștigă nimic și deoarece deține același simbol ca al atacatorului, se va calcula diferența de puncte de la influență și se va adăuga la scorul principal, chiar dacă este un cartonaș de apărare. În cazul de față cartonașul cu numărul 20 câștigă $13-7=6$ puncte, iar cartonașul cu numărul 4, va câștiga $19-7=12$ puncte, care se vor adăuga scorului principal de joc. După ce s-au verificat indicii cu galben și s-a făcut calculul punctelor de INFLUENȚĂ, se va face calculul numerelor principale ale tuturor cartonașelor. În cazul de față, $19-4=15$. Cartonașul numărul 19 a câștigat 15 puncte atacând cartonașul cu numărul 4. După care atacă cartonașul cu numărul 18, câștigând un punct, $19-18=1$, iar de pe cartonașul cu numărul 20 nu câștigă nimic, deoarece este mai mare decât 19. După ce a acumulat aceste puncte de pe cartonașele 4 și 18, se va face adunarea rezultatului dintre punctele acumulate, dei cartonașul cu numărul 19, câștiga $1+15=16$ puncte în acest duel.

Deoarece este un joc cu cartonașe vor fi multe situații de genul acesta. Aici vi-am explicat modul de atac și de apărare în cazul conexiunii cu mai multe cartonașe.

The Limping Singer carefully studies the rule manual, thanking Ion and saying:

- It's perfect now. I understand every element of the scoring rules. I will reproduce it in my world without Marius knowing, and I will sell it to King Charlemagne to escape poverty.

- But above all, she needs to know how to avoid the death that will occur in the year 814, eight years from the world you come from now.

- Yes. I hope that's possible.

- Singer, does Marius know that I regularly summon you here?

- He's very paranoid; he knows nothing. If he were to find out, it wouldn't be good. I've struggled to hide the AEIOU drawing from which you summon me, so it wouldn't be destroyed. He loves me immensely, and I told him that the disappearance of this drawing is due to its sale for our living, but he doesn't know it's hidden in the room's corner where we live. That's how I managed to summon you into my world so you could copy what Marius drew in Clona.

- I understand now. But what is the purpose of your presence here?

- To learn about the future, Ion.

At this moment, the raven appears at the workshop window.

- See this raven, Ion? I sent it from my world using a time teleportation ritual to help you better understand what's happening. This raven is the only bird that can materialize in multiple dimensions of space and time, transmitting messages to me. The ancient-language note it brought when you found the AEIOU drawing—I wrote it. It was also sent here to find the missing elements from the drawing and complete the prophecy. The visions described in the six drawings are irreversible. It is the destiny of this world in space and time. And you already possess three of them. You drew the Hell Gate drawing in 2003 after a dream you had. Genetic memory is transmitted into the future, Ion, with each reincarnation. But it can only be visualized through dreams. The transparency of your thoughts will enable a new global revolution of peace, where the evil of humanity will disappear along with lies.

- What does all this have to do with Sol Invictus? asks Ion, curious.

- The Magician game was invented in those centuries but was burned back then so Marius could reincarnate with me in the year 806, the year of wisdom when most cultural manuscripts made their presence. Among them, the six missing drawings from the Codex. Show me the cards, please.

INFLUENȚĂ 13
PUTERE +30 (2, 7, 19)

20 Lumină 

INFLUENȚĂ 11
PUTERE -7 (10, 20, 8)

15 Morți vii 

INFLUENȚĂ 20
PUTERE +7 (21, 18, 16)

24 Ecotoplasma 

INFLUENȚĂ 1
PUTERE +7 (14, 22, 13)

21 Cheia 

INFLUENȚĂ 3
PUTERE -7 (3, 12, 11)

23 Sfoară 

INFLUENȚĂ 23
PUTERE +7 (12, 4, 7)

22 Carte 

INFLUENȚĂ 18
PUTERE +7 (12, 9, 6)

18 Pumnal 

INFLUENȚĂ 24
PUTERE -7 (5, 6, 9)

16 Placă Oulja 

INFLUENȚĂ 7
PUTERE +7 (7, 15, 22)

19 Apă Sfântă 

INFLUENȚĂ 16
PUTERE +7 (23, 25, 28)

3 Soriu 

INFLUENȚĂ 13
PUTERE -7 (26, 28, 13)

17 Șarpe 

INFLUENȚĂ 19
PUTERE +20 (10, 11, 22)

4 Poziune 

INFLUENȚĂ 22
PUTERE +20 (11,23,12)

13 Mollie




INFLUENȚĂ 15
PUTERE +5 (10,23,12)

11 Oase umane




INFLUENȚĂ 4
PUTERE +12 (6,14,10)

9 Ciuperci




INFLUENȚĂ 12
PUTERE +10 (12,0,18)

10 Pictură




INFLUENȚĂ 12
PUTERE -5 (12,0,8)

5 Foc




INFLUENȚĂ 5
PUTERE +15 (5,8,8)

12 Apă




INFLUENȚĂ 5
PUTERE +18 (5,0,8)

8 Aer




INFLUENȚĂ 12
PUTERE +7 (5,6,8)

6 Pământ




INFLUENȚĂ 12
PUTERE +20 (5,6,8)

7 Rugăciune




INFLUENȚĂ 6
PUTERE +12 (5,6,8)

1 Spirit




INFLUENȚĂ 22
PUTERE +12 (21,22,23)

2 Gheară




INFLUENȚĂ 10
PUTERE +12 (16,17,16)

14 Ochi






- Sure. Here they are.

The limping Singer memorizes all 32 cards, after which she touches Ion and evaporates back to the year she came from.

Ion was thinking that if the future in the year 806 will be influenced by this numerology-focused oracle, what will happen in the world he lives in now? Surely there will be major changes, and history will be rewritten in a different way than the existing one. He places the drawing next to the others on the shelf, then starts the video camera set up by the professor to speak with him:

- Good day, Mr. Arion. I have news from the limping Singer.
- I'm listening, Ion.
- Reincarnation exists.
- What do you mean? I don't understand.
- Mr. Arion. Any precious thing thrown into the fire, if it has accumulated information, will be lost forever in exchange for something that the Devil will demand.
- Please be more explicit.
- We live in a world full of rules. Everything is so organized that everything we experience is not considered a personal matter but rather something someone else has told us and taught us to call in one way or another. How to react, what names objects have, how to understand things, and everything we do. All of these are based on very strict rules. I sometimes feel like we live in a game where the story is already written, and the game creator is just having fun. All our actions are coordinated, but the result has multiple options. Here fate comes in, and each individual's own choice. I don't know if I told you about the Magician game. It is an oracle I invented after some studies of numerology and symbolism. It is based on the calculation method of the City Game, with slight modifications and game strategy. But the principle is the same. This game influences the destiny I told you about and gives the player the opportunity to find out what awaits them in the near future and how to act.
- You haven't told me about this oracle, but it sounds very interesting.
- First, I want to give you news. Vasu is out of the prophecy we're working on. Only I, you, Vera, and the library manager remain. We still need one person to hold the fifth drawing on the corner of the pentagram once we have them all.
- You must find him, Ion.
- I was thinking of the archaeology doctor, Radu. He is a trusted friend. He just needs to accept. And regarding the Magician game, I played it with only one person. With Vasu. The result was incredibly accurate, and what was said about the result he obtained came true in the very near future. This card game exists in a limited number of five copies. What is interesting about this game is that it doesn't matter who wins until you gather all your opponent's cards in the graveyard of the game, surpassing 1000 points. It contains both written and unwritten rules.

- What are the unwritten rules? the professor asks curiously.
- There are some rules that I have in mind, but something tells me never to highlight them. Nowhere. In practice, they are some variants of calculating the final score.

Ion starts collecting the Magician game from the table, puts it in the black velvet pouch, and places it on the cabinet shelf. Afterward, he has lunch and calls Radu:

- Hello, Radu? We urgently need to discuss an extremely important matter. I am sure it will dismantle all the skepticism you have. Do you remember that I told you what's been happening for some time? Things have become complicated, and significant changes have occurred. We want you to be part of our research team, along with Vera, Mr. Arion, the library manager, and me. You can make significant discoveries about Sol Invictus, but above all, to learn certain secrets of the universe, such as reincarnation and gaining immortality. Can you come to my place for a coffee and talk?

- We better meet at the museum, said Radu.

- Okay. I'll be there in fifteen minutes.

On the way, Ion takes the three drawings with him. Arriving at the museum, Radu was waiting for him in front of the building. The two sat on a bench with a table, where Ion lit a cigarette, saying:

- Radu, regarding Sol Invictus, I can say that they invented an Oracle, which passed through time but got lost, eventually leading me to create it in our times. It's called the Magician. Let me show it to you.

Ion took out the pouch with illustrated cards and showed them to Radu, telling him everything about this game. Radu had a scared expression on his face, but when Ion told him that everything would be okay, he calmed down.

- I played this Oracle. You just need to play it with the other three because it can be played with 2, 4, 8, and 16 players. The information about the resulting number will tell us about the future actions we need to take to fulfill the prophecy and where we can find the other three drawings.

Radu looks at Ion for a long time, telling him that he believes one of the drawings is in the museum's archive because it has very high similarities with the thin line style and type of hatching, even having Marius's monogram on the drawing. But it's not this composition style; it's a map of their city's citadel.



R08



The two enter the archives through a very small door and study the drawing of the citadel, both concluding that it must be the fourth drawing from the Codex. More importantly, the surface of the paper is inscribed in the old language, the year 806. But how can a drawing from this year highlight a citadel built in the 18th century? And why hasn't the authenticity issue been raised in this case by the museum? Ion takes out his mobile phone, scans the drawing, measures it, goes home, designs it in a graphic program, then prints it at the same dimensions on manually made similar paper. He returns to the museum and replaces the original with this faithful copy, adding it to the other three drawings. It was Ion's and Radu's secret until they solved the mystery.

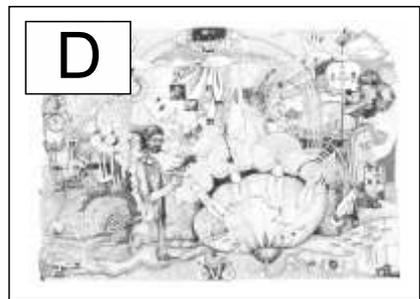
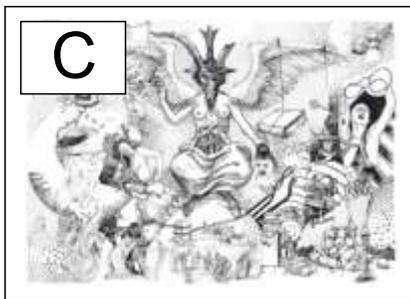
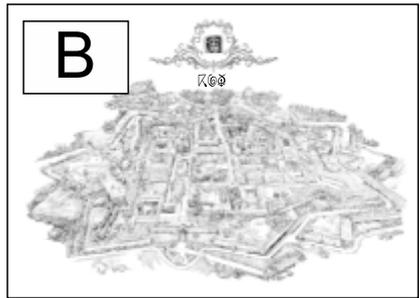
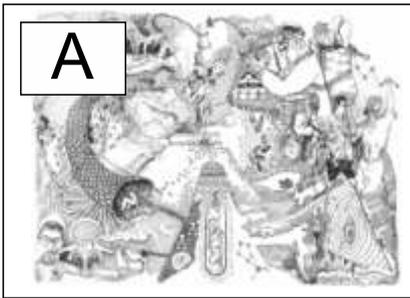
Ion calls the library manager, Professor Arion, and Vera, asking if they can meet at "La Vrăbiuța Vesela" to see Radu. They all agree, and the five of them meet. The artist takes out the folder with drawings and shows all four of them, laying them out on the table at the local establishment, telling them they have a new member on the team, Radu, hoping that Vera will join too. Convincing Vera to be part of their team wouldn't be difficult, as she had absolute trust in Ion.

- What's happening? Vera asked curiously, smiling.

The three began calmly explaining absolutely everything to her. All the connections between her and the limping Singer, about the portrait from the dream, her connection with Marius from the past, the song that would complete the ritual of immortality, and many other important aspects of their adventure. She listened carefully to every detail, shocked but at the same time hopeful, realizing that nothing happens by chance and that her relationship with Ion is due to this reincarnation.

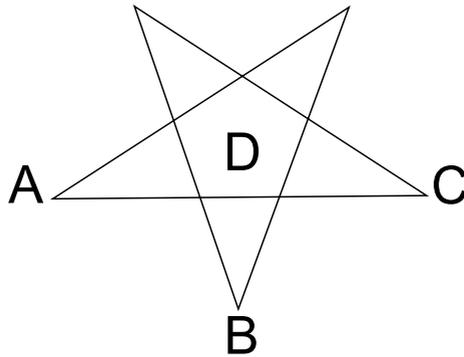
The five scrutinized the four drawings carefully, noticing that each drawing had begun to emit light simultaneously, similar to the rhythm of a heartbeat.

- Incredible, said the professor. We're close. This drawing with the fortress will tell us where the other two drawings are. We just need to overlay the drawings and look for clues that will lead us there.



And, of course, to position them correctly on the corners of the pentagram, said Ion. For this, we have very clear clues. Saying this, he took some notes on which he wrote letters and drew a pentagram on a white sheet of paper, marking these letters that corresponded to each drawing on its corners.

- What are they? Radu asked.



- Drawing A represents the past because it was drawn from a dream state, reflecting the drawing from the year 806. So it is positioned on the left side. Drawing D speaks about the past, present, and future, so it is in the center. Drawing C represents the Devil, so it will be on the right because it was drawn in the year 2003, and numerology is $2+0+0+3=5$, starting the count from the bottom, the position is correct, representing all five corners of this pentagram, but the image describes suffering in this position. In drawing B, it tells the story of the underground fortress, referring to the current one, so it will be positioned at the bottom. The other two drawings should refer to perception, the universe, struggle, thinking, territory, birth, and death simultaneously, as they will be positioned where the horns of the goat suggest emerging from the pentagram. Maybe they haven't been drawn yet, but what is clear is that these drawings need to be overlaid individually to look for clues and figure out what else needs to be drawn. Because these two positions reflect the present. And as you can see, they directly connect through the axes of the pentagram with the fortress. From here, we need to search for clues. A starting point would be to pay attention to every detail in the cathedral where the Corvin family is buried. It has a direct connection to the crow that initiated this adventure. Surely, I will find a clue for the fifth drawing there.

- Very good arguments and intuition, said the library manager, downing the glass of mulled wine with cinnamon brought by the bartender.

- We are already a team. Vasu was a traitor, so he was taken out of the equation, only us remaining. We must have absolute trust in each other, Ion said, gathering the drawings from the table, carefully placing them in a folder, bidding farewell, heading towards the cathedral.

Arrived in the cathedral, Ion found the baroque area that caught his attention with a sculpture of a limping girl next to which there was a skull. It was evident that it represented the cycle of life, birth, and death in a single composition, thinking that this is the element he must draw for the upper right part of the pentagram. He took out a white sheet of paper and started drawing. Suddenly, the crow entered the cathedral and settled on the sculpture Ion was drawing, remaining motionless until Ion finished the drawing.

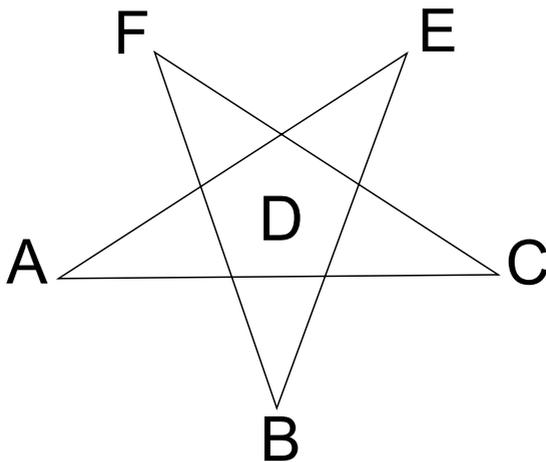
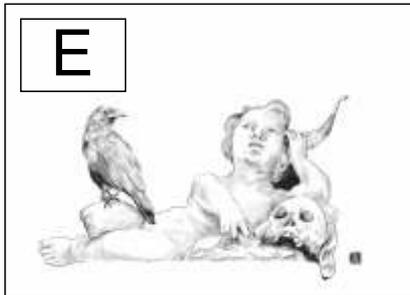
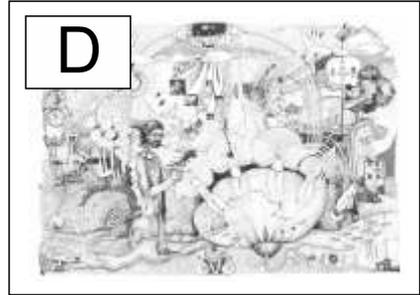
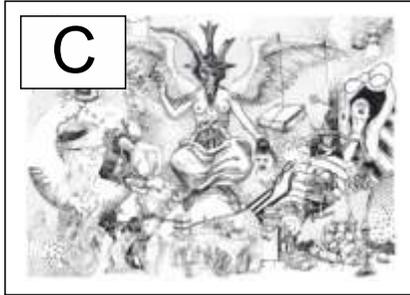
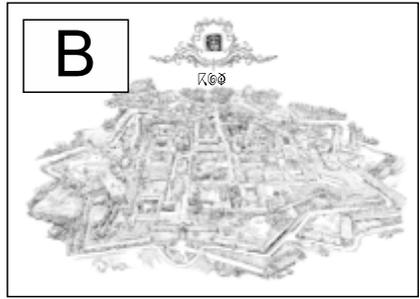
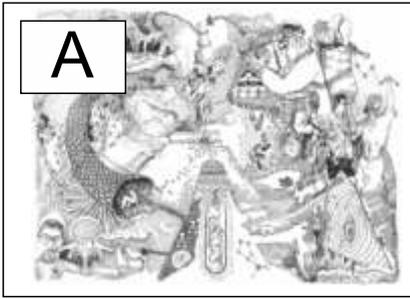


The artist adopted the old signature from the other drawings. This must undoubtedly be the fifth drawing, he thought. When he finished signing the drawing, it, along with the others in the folder, began to shine five times. But where was the last drawing? Looking at the sketch with the positioning of the drawings on the pentagram symbol, he noticed that the last drawing is also connected to the fortress. So he had to think about where it is and discover or create it. Back home, he placed the drawings on the cupboard, lighting a cigarette and smoking it with pleasure. He was thinking about what connection could be made for the drawings to be complete. He went down to the basement, where he found a folder with works from his student days. He flipped through the drawings, and when he touched one, it began to shine like the others. Yes. The answer was already there. He found the sixth drawing. It represented a mother with her child, but the umbilical cords were depicted unnaturally. The child was feeding from the mother's breast, who had three breasts, and two of them were

connected to the woman's forehead. It represented procreation and implicit protection. The need to manage his growth. It was tied to nourishment, birth, the internal communication of the infant with the mother, the very close bond between the two. Genetic inheritance.



Ion took the drawing, and when he placed it in the folder with the other five drawings, the folder lit up in a blue light from which orange rays emerged. He had all the drawings of the prophecy. He was afraid of what might happen after the ritual was done, but he felt that he had to perform this ritual. He sent messages to the four friends, telling them he wanted to meet them on Saturday at midnight in the museum archives, where they would have to draw the pentagram on the floor, and each person would hold a drawing corresponding to the corners of the pentagram. Later, they would play the passage of the musical composition composed by Ion and Vera, sung out loud. How easily he had found the sixth drawing. It was always at his home. Ion wrapped the folder with drawings in a blanket to cover its constant glow and headed to the museum. It was Saturday morning. He entered the museum archives and prepared the space for the ritual that would take place at midnight, drawing a perfect pentagram, placing candles at each corner, putting the drawings in the correct order, waiting for the others to arrive.



CHAPTER II

---THE RITUAL---

The time has come. The five friends gathered in the museum archive room, looking questioningly at the drawings wrapped in a shade of blue that emitted orange rays of light, positioned at each corner of the pentagram. Each person took a seat in a corner of the symbol drawn on the floor, holding a drawing in hand, singing out loud the musical passage conceived by Vera and Ion.

Suddenly, the room turned into such an intense orange that nothing could be seen around due to the color. All the archive shelves deteriorated, documents evaporated, the walls transformed into rust and mold-filled ruins. Vegetation instantly started emerging from the floor, coiling around each person holding a drawing until it completely covered their bodies, slowly sinking into the floor until they all disappeared completely into the earth, traveling through a tunnel of vegetation into the depths. As they descended into the depths, the five friends could see each other, getting closer until they merged, becoming a single person with unique characteristics. This new individual continued descending toward the center of the earth until, suddenly, they plunged into deep water, crossing it, falling into the middle of a pentagram through a mirror whose glass was just a thin, soft film that cushioned the fall. They were surrounded by five people dressed in red hooded cloaks, wearing masks shaped like goat skulls. Five minutes passed, and the character slowly lifted their head, with the naked body, looking around at these people, and as they looked at them, they knelt in front of him with their hands stretched out on the floor.

-What is my name? asked the character.

All the people with red hooded cloaks turned their gaze toward him, not understanding what he was asking in the modern language of the 21st century. The character repeated the same question in the ancient language:

𐌆𐌆𐌆𐌆𐌆𐌆 𐌆𐌆 𐌆𐌆𐌆𐌆 𐌆𐌆

One of the kneeling individuals stood up and walked towards the character, taking off their mask. It was Marius, who responded in his language:



- Wonderful, your name is Ion. I spoke with the limping Singer, my wife, and she told me everything. You are me from other times. We have been waiting for you to appear because we were absolutely convinced that you would obtain all the drawings to complete the ritual and with this, heal my wife from narcolepsy.

- What happened to my friends? What about Vera?

- They were sacrificial pawns to fulfill the sacred spell.

- Who are you?

- We call ourselves the Purgatory of Ink. We operate according to an unbeatable ideology. I suppose you realize that you are in the year 806.

Saying this, Marius hands Ion a red cloak to cover his exposed body.

Ion stands up and walks towards the mirror in the room where he is to see himself, but he is astonished to notice that he is invisible in its reflection. He asks Marius to paint a portrait for him.

Marius paints his portrait and approaches Ion with a goblet filled with the blood of a sacrificed maiden, taking it to Ion's mouth. Sensing its smell, Ion doesn't hesitate to gulp it down eagerly.



- I look much younger than I am in my world. Why do I have this insatiable thirst for blood? Why don't I see myself in the mirror?

- Because you are the only existing vampire on earth. You have gained immortality but with great sacrifice, condemned to darkness and forced to feed on human blood to survive.

- Am I still in my city?

- Yes, only it's called the White Citadel, and the first documentary attestation with the name Alba Transylvana in your world was in the year 1082. That is over 276 years from now. Our order gave it this name. Now, then, and in the future.

- How often do I need to feed?

- Once every four days. When your face starts to tighten, said Marius, signaling to his members to stand up.

- We know that you have knowledge of Old Language and can speak and write it effortlessly. I would like you to write in this language about the technologies of the future so that all our members can understand.
- Of course. Where is the limping Singer now?

From the group of five, the limping Singer takes off her hood and mask, approaching Ion, caressing his face, kissing his cheek, saying:

- Wonderful one, we will die, but you will survive, and when you reach the year 2022, you will know who I am, and you will recognize me once again. About how you will act, only you have this knowledge, and you will not stop this ritual that took place to become immortal. I told you that we would meet, and I would touch you. With the sacrifice of completion between you and Vera. I know you loved her, but you will have to be patient for a thousand and something years until she is reborn or until you return to your world. Until then, follow us. We have prepared a room for you in this citadel. Here is our entire family from the Purgatory of Ink.



Ion enters his room in the White Citadel, where there is a bookshelf, a table with a candle, a bed, and three chairs. The walls are covered with bright red fabric, and the floor is made of cubic stone. After a few minutes, someone knocks on the massive wooden door of the room entrance. It's Marius and the limping Singer. They enter Ion's room, sit on chairs, and the limping Singer begins to narrate:

- This is a world of wars and conquests. But the conquests of King Charlemagne have ended, and our king now emphasizes cultural issues, gathering all the wise men in the kingdom to write the greatest masterpieces. Marius is tasked with drawing the most valuable Codices. The reason we awaited your arrival here is to draw together with yourself, meaning with Marius, a Codex that has not existed and will not exist anywhere, speaking of immortality, the future, and reincarnation. I don't know if you noticed, but when you fell into the middle of the pentagram during the ritual, the drawings you collected in your world to complete the ritual appeared in our world. We gathered them and placed them securely. Marius threw one of them into the fire to sell it to the devil, hoping that what he asked for would be fulfilled. It seems it has. I helped you reproduce it in your world. Although it is not him, it is you, but at the same time, it is him. You share the same type of thinking and preferences. The difference is that you are immortal. After Marius dies, his genetic memory will belong to you, and he will live through you for eternity.

- Now we know the future, what will happen in the next 1400 years thanks to you, and we know how to avoid the worst and change the course of history if necessary, said Marius. My visions were with you, about the technologies in your world, about the sick society you have, and how much power traders and industry have gained. You need to know an important thing. You have the ability to change your appearance whenever you want, in the physiognomy of Radu, Cristian, Vera, or Professor Arion. You are now part of the Purgatory of Ink. Tonight we will have the initiation ceremony. We await your presence, to wear this goat skull as a mask and this red hooded cloak on your head.

Marius places the garments on the nightstand in the room and a map, showing Ion how to reach the location where the ceremony will take place, and leaves with the limping Singer, exiting the room.

MUSEUM ARCHIVES, DECEMBER 31, 2022 - 1:00 PM

The museum employees enter the archives. Thirteen hours had passed, and to their surprise, they could see that all the archive shelves were covered with vegetation with numerous branches, the walls severely corroded by rust and mold, and the pentagram drawn on the floor had deepened, leaving traces of burns on either side of the symbol's line. The mysterious disappearance of the five individuals alerted the authorities. No one could explain how these people vanished. The archives were full of police gathering evidence. Meanwhile, Vasu appears and approaches the chief police commissioner, saying with a smile:

- I see they completed the ritual.

- Do you know anything about this incident?

- Quite a lot, I would say.

- I'm listening.

- A few days ago, I met the graphic artist from the Culture Center, with whom I've been friends since childhood. He taught me to speak a long-lost language called Old Language. He said it was a language spoken in the year 806, as well as in the 1st-4th centuries. After that, I participated in a fantastic affair related to a drawing belonging to a Codex, which, together with other drawings, formed a ritual through which Ion and the participants could become immortal. It seems they performed this ritual, but they disappeared.

- What abilities did that drawing have?

- It made a character drawn from its content appear, but it manifested as a hologram, claiming to come from other times, more precisely from the year the drawing was conceived: 806.

- Interesting. Continue.

- Mr. Commissioner, Ion was angry with me before the ritual. I was supposed to be one of the missing persons. I'm glad it happened. Who knows where I would be now.

The commissioner carefully examines the burns left on the floor in the lines of the pentagram and notices a very subtle detail highlighted, similar to woodburning on the parquet floor. All the drawings had outlined themselves as if they had been engraved in wood where they were supposed to be placed at the corners of the pentagram. He took some photographs, then went to the old library, entered the manager's office, and saw prominently printed on the wall the AEIOU drawing, which he studied carefully.

WHITE CITADEL, DECEMBER 31, 806 - 10:00 PM

Ion entered through a door of the citadel leading to an underground chamber, continuing into a labyrinth of rooms. He checked the map Marius had given him and arrived at the chamber where the initiation would take place. Putting on the hooded cloak and placing the goat skull mask on his face, he proceeded through the column of the five members of the order, reaching an altar where an individual dressed in a red cloak with a hood and mask stood, holding a dagger. On the altar lay a few-month-old baby crying.



There was very little time left until sunrise. Ion reached his room with very small windows, covered them, and noticed that instead of the bed that was in the room, there was a well-arranged coffin. He lay down in it and slept until nine in the evening the next day. He woke up and went to the shelf of a cupboard where there were some books. He looked carefully and noticed a book with an ouroboros on the cover. He opened the book, being able to read in the ancient language about the events happening in White City and the history of the city. Very curious to learn more, Ion transformed his appearance into Vera's, taking her abilities to play the piano. He dressed in a black coat and headed to the city's concert hall, where there was an organ with tubes. He sat down and began to play the melody composed in the other world. After a very short time, a character with large mustaches and a beard entered the concert hall. It was the governor of White City, who began to applaud loudly.

- Exceptional! he exclaimed. Who are you? I haven't seen you around here before, and certainly, a person as beautiful and talented as yourself would stand out immediately.

Suddenly, Vera stopped playing. She stood up, turned her head towards the governor, smiling, telling him that her appearance was fleeting, just a visit. However, she had seen that in two days at eight in the evening, there would be a music interpretation contest, and she was thinking of participating. So, she came here to rehearse.

- We are very excited about your presence, said the governor. We expect you at the contest. Singers from the entire region will be present. I hope you win!

Vera took a few steps toward the governor, reaching him, looking into his eyes for a long time, taking a handkerchief from her coat pocket and wiping his right shoulder.

- You had some dust, she said, smiling.

- Thank you! responded the embarrassed governor. My name is Gheorghe. I am the governor of this city. As long as you stay here, you are my guest. I live on the third sloping street from the walnut tree, the fourth house on the left. I look forward to having you for dinner at my place before the contest.

- I will come with pleasure, replied Vera, heading towards the exit of the concert hall, making herself invisible. When she reached a corner of a barn, she transformed back into Ion's appearance, telling herself in her mind that it was an advantage that she could change her appearance to become similar to her friends. She knew they hadn't died but lived through him.

It was the evening before the competition. Before heading to the concert hall, Ion took on Vera's appearance and headed to the governor's house. Upon arrival, he rang the doorbell three times, waiting. The governor opened the door, delighted by Vera's presence, inviting her inside.

- Please come in! I have prepared the table.

- Thank you, said Vera, entering the governor's large house. His eyes sparkled at the sight of Vera's beauty. They had dinner, and he asked the pianist to tell him about her life.

- Please, play a melody that will create immense pleasure for the jury and participants. I am convinced that you will win the organ competition. But please tell me, where are you from?

- From the Mammoth Forests, replied Vera. I am a more reserved person, and I have a house there where the main way of life is to gather mushrooms and sell them in nearby towns to ensure my livelihood. Here, I live with a kind-hearted family that provides everything I need for decent living conditions while I stay in the city.

- There's still an hour until the start of the competition, said the governor. Allow me to escort you to the concert hall.

Saying this, the governor and Vera headed to the city's concert hall, where there was a lot of people.





Vera's performance left everyone in the concert hall astounded, and she easily won the grand prize of the competition, which consisted of a black racing horse named Ink, along with all the accessories. What a coincidence of name with the Purgatory of Ink.

Vera thanked the organizers, the audience, especially the governor, but her thoughts were on the fact that four days had passed since she fed on the blood of a mortal, and she needed to find a new victim. She mounted the horse, and as she galloped towards the citadel where she resided, she transformed back into Ion's original appearance. It was late, and upon reaching the field, he noticed a small group of people, one of them being a woman playing the ravanastron, the ancestor of the current violin.

Ion dismounted and approached the fire slowly, stopping a few meters away from the woman, beginning to accompany her with his beautiful voice. His voice synchronized so well with the sound of the instrument that the woman stopped playing and walked towards Ion, embracing him. Ion stepped away with her in his arms behind a tree,

biting her neck and eagerly sucking her blood. Afterward, he disappeared, mounting the horse and placing the woman on the saddle, taking her lifeless body to the citadel where he lived, throwing her into the courtyard well to avoid detection or arousing suspicion.



- Ion, it seems you've learned how to satisfy your hunger and hide your victims," whispered the limping singer towards the artist, making a mysterious appearance from the darkness. "I want to tell you that your game, the Magus, has been a real success among the nobility, and we have gained many Pores from it, managing to acquire this citadel where we live."

- Pores? asked Ion.

- Yes, it's a currency invented by Marius that high merchants put into circulation. It can only buy expensive things, having a very high value.

- You're right about genetic memory, especially since, in 2022, I invented the same currency on an online trading platform using the BEP-20 system. But it didn't trade at all; it was designed for a board game I created called "The Citadel Game." I only created a million virtual units, and the physical format of this coin exists there in a limited number of 20 copies.

- Interesting, smiled the limping singer. Ion, we have a mission for you. Rest now, as it is very late, and we will meet in the round table room tomorrow morning. But to avoid being affected by light, you must take the appearance of one of the people you merged with. Only when you

hunt to feed, you must have your original appearance. You must be very cautious because when you have a different appearance, you are vulnerable and can be killed. The advantage is that you can look at yourself and appear in the reflection of a mirror like a normal person.

- I understand. See you then, said Ion, heading towards his room, sitting in the coffin, and resting until the next morning when he was awakened by a loud bang.

Scared, he got up and looked out the small window in the courtyard, where he saw someone standing in front of a table with many test tubes, conducting experiments and filling the yard with colored smoke. While watching the eccentric alchemist, suddenly, in front of the window, the limping singer appeared, telling Ion to get ready for the round table in the ghost hall. Ion donned the red hooded cloak and assumed the appearance of Radu, going into the daylight, heading towards the ghost hall. There, the seven members of the Ink Purgatory were waiting for him, asking him to take a seat at the round table, which had a map of the entire city with certain marks dotted on it. Marius stood up and said:

- Good morning. We have all gathered here this morning to discuss an important mission that Ion will carry out with his abilities. It's about killing the governor of White Citadel and strategically positioning a member of the Ink Purgatory in the governor's post. This hypocritical leader wants to abolish the Pore coin, which is vital for the prosperity of our city and the economy of the entire region.

- I am ready to do this, especially since Vera is now close to the governor, and I know where he lives, said Ion through Radu's body. I am ready. I just need to find a suitable moment for this. Especially since this governor has a weakness for Vera. I observed that.

- Saying this, Ion took on Vera's appearance, mounted his horse, and galloped towards the White Citadel, towards the governor's house. While galloping with Ink, the raven followed him. Surprised by the appearance of the crow, Vera smiled. Arriving at the governor's house, she took a parchment, a quill, and ink from her pocket, leaving a message on the door:

"Mr. Governor, I was deeply impressed by your hospitality, and I immensely enjoyed the musical interpretation contest and the audience, but especially the prize offered. I would be very happy to somehow repay you. Dinner was tasty. I know you have a family, and probably this

occupies all your time, but I want to meet you in the concert hall when the evening falls today to talk to you and personally thank you for everything.

---VERA---

Vera attached the note to a nail on the governor's door, mounted her black horse, and went to Citadel Square, where people were being hanged for breaking the law, looking at them and waiting for the evening to come for the precious meeting in case the governor honored her with his presence in the concert hall to complete the first mission given by the Ink Purgatory. There in the square, she took some sheets of paper from her pocket and began to draw portraits of the present citizens to gain popularity, especially since cultural life began to gain value in White Citadel. Raising her eyes, Vera could see the crow soaring in the sky. They had become inseparable again. At some point, a gentleman dressed in expensive clothes appeared in front of her, entering into a dialogue with Vera:

- It's wonderful to see a completely fulfilled artist both in music and in drawing. I am the bishop of the entire region. I listened to your musical performance yesterday at the contest held in the concert hall of White Citadel. It was downright impressive! I hope you like the horse you won as a prize. It was donated for this contest by the Episcopate. We need talented people like you, so I propose an irresistible contract. Can you come to the bishopric this evening to discuss this matter?

- Good day, Mr. Bishop. I am happy to see that there is appreciation from great people like you. Of course. I will come to the bishopric a little later after sunset, said Vera, thinking that she would have the perfect alibi for killing the governor in case she was suspected of committing the heinous act. But until then, if you are here, I would like to draw your portrait for as long as your heart allows.

- Of course! said the bishop, sitting on a boulder beside the artist. Vera drew the bishop's portrait with incredible speed, and in gratitude, he paid her with a Pore coin for the artistic performance.

- This coin has a very high value! said Vera amazed.





- This is the real value of this work of art, said the bishop. See you tonight. I'll be waiting for you at the Bishopric of the region. Saying this, he took the drawing, stood up, and vanished into the crowd.

After drawing several portraits of people in the square, Vera gathered her things, mounted her horse, and rode through the field on the outskirts of White Citadel until evening, then headed to the concert hall to meet the governor. Arriving in front of the building, she tied her horse to a nearby fence and entered the concert hall, which was deserted, seeing the governor sitting on a bench, waiting for her. Vera approached him, greeting him. The governor stood up and kissed her right hand.

- I'm glad to see you, Vera. Will you tell me something important since you called me? What is it about?



- Of course, Governor, Vera uttered in a slightly aggressive tone as she spun the Pore coin given by the bishop on her finger.

- Where did you get this coin? asked the governor, shocked.

- I don't think it matters where I got it. What's important is that you want to eradicate this currency, and you'll do everything possible for it to happen through the high-level connections you have. You've already taken steps in this regard. Something that has upset many influential people who own a significant sum, wanting you dead for this reason. My mission is to kill you, Mr. Governor, and stop this madness. But I thought better of it, and your death won't solve anything. On the contrary, it will worsen things. I've decided to give you another chance to live, Mr. Governor, said Vera, positioning herself behind the governor, caressing his neck with a sharp nail. I could take your life right now. There's no one around us, and I don't recommend making any wrong moves.

As she spoke, Vera lightly scratched the governor's neck with her nail, letting a little blood flow, which she eagerly licked.

- What should I do? the governor uttered with a trembling voice.

- Leave as far away as possible, and let no one know about you. I recommend another region, but not before naming Marius as the governor. Support this currency wherever you go. Only then can you live peacefully. Otherwise, I'll have to take your life. I spared you now because your hospitality exceeded my expectations, but think about the fact that your luck is due to the fact that they chose me to handle this issue. If they had delegated to someone else, you would already be

cold. Leave right now with the horse I won at the interpretation contest. Take this Pore coin with you. It will help you a lot. You can exchange it for seventeen gold coins, and write a letter stating that Marius will be the governor of White Citadel, signed by you, stating that you have a spirit of adventure and have set out on an expedition to other regions.

Vera put the Pore gold coin in the governor's pocket, took the keys to the house, and the letter signed by him, telling him that if she ever meets him again, he won't have the same luck. Heading to the bishopric, the crow descends from the sky on Vera's shoulder, who walks with it to the bishop's palace. They enter. At the entrance was the bishop, who invites her to go up to the room of words. Once there, the bishop gallantly swallows a grape, showing Vera his portrait hanging on the wall:

- How beautiful it is, isn't it? You have an unimaginable talent. But that's not why I called you here.

- I'm all ears.

- The king has finished his conquests and is now focusing on the cultural side, trying to gather the greatest cultural figures and create the most wonderful literary and artistic masterpieces. Your talent qualifies you for this honorable job, Vera. I offer you a monthly salary if you illustrate the texts I will give you every month. One drawing a month for one Pore each. I am generous, but I know how to appreciate great talents. What do you say?

- I accept this offer, honored bishop.

- Perfect. Usually, I will give you quatrains to illustrate. I will provide you with paper, pen, and ink.

As the bishop spoke, the crow flew onto the table full of fruits and select dishes, pecking a few grapes, then settled back on Vera's shoulder as she left with the first poem to illustrate and the drawing set.

- Oh, she sighed looking at the crow, what do I do now? I gave the governor's horse. I'll have to find a carriage going to the city where I live. Probably the governor has one at home.

She headed to the governor's house while taking on Ion's appearance, unlocked the gate, and entered the stable where there was a magnificent carriage with two white horses. She set off for the city to deliver the news to Marius, who eagerly awaited details about the mission.

- Because he is an influential man who trusts me for what I do, unlike others. And it is an exercise for me to read famous quatrains of great scholars. This way, I will learn things about the current society and what else is happening in this world.

- Justifiable, Marius replies. The alchemist of the order is working on a hallucinogenic solution that induces a deep sleep for 48 hours. The punishment for not completing your mission is that tonight you will travel to Malemboch to find the city's merchant and convince him to sell you, with these Pores, 40 pieces of Rare Leaf and 20 of Pig Flea, which you must bring to this citadel. Tuş is in the stables, waiting for you. Get here by sunrise, as the light will affect you horribly, potentially causing your death if you maintain your original appearance. I recommend you take the form of Mr. Arion. He's older and exudes more credibility.

Ion takes the appearance of Mr. Arion, mounts his horse, and sets off for Malemboch. While riding, he thinks about an important aspect, namely that if he managed to travel from the year 2022 to the year 806, there is certainly the possibility of traveling back, either through the pentagram in the basement of the History Museum or otherwise.

ARCHIVES OF THE MUSEUM, DECEMBER 31, 2022 - 01:35 AM

The History Museum's basement was sealed off for police investigations related to the disappearance of the five individuals. Similarly, the Library Manager's office, where the chief commissioner was present, was sealed. In his hands, he held a notebook in which he took notes about the drawing he had studied for several hours. The AEIOU drawing was printed large on the entire wall of the office. After carefully examining the room, the commissioner noticed a notebook containing analyses of the drawing in front of him, written by the library manager. Scrutinizing one sheet of these notes, the commissioner's attention was drawn to the use of an ancient language, deciphered. In this way, the commissioner was able to read the crow's note, copied by the manager, as well as other entries from the journal on the table, understanding what was happening. He was well aware that he shouldn't clean the place where the pentagram was in the museum archives, but secretly light the candles at the corners of the pentagram and hum the ritual highlighted by the musical notes written by Vera after Ion's composition. He believed it was his only chance to bring the five individuals back.

The Commissioner quickly leaves the manager's office with the notebook, heading towards the museum's cellar where the ritual was performed. He photographs with his high-tech device all the pyrographed drawings on the floor, studying them on the digital screen, able to observe the drawing with the fortress on which the year 806 was written in the ancient language. In this way, he realizes the year the five arrived and is aware that he must find a clue to bring them back and recover the drawings whose originals were safely placed by members of the Ink Purgatory at that time.

It was 2:00 in the morning. There was no one in the museum, only the darkness of the halls and the silence that housed millennia of information through the objects inside. While studying the photographs taken, a voice is heard from the corner of the room:

- You have no idea what you've gotten into, Commissioner.

The Commissioner turns abruptly with the flashlight to the corner where the voice was heard and, frightened, observes the hologram of a man wearing a red hood with a goat skull on his face.

- What's happening? Who are you?

- I am the projection of the priest from the order I represent, 2000 years old. We cannot appear in flesh and bone, and the location from which I speak to you now is strictly secret and far in time. I have appeared because we share the same goal. To make it possible for the five to return.

- I didn't think holograms were real, said the Commissioner. What do I need to do?

- You need to find a manuscript that highlights the time and location where Ion's return ritual must be performed. The manuscript is in the archives of this museum. Allow me to make myself understood so that you realize the situation you are in. Since the year 806, this site has been led by the Ink Purgatory. An order 2000 years old founded by a pagan cult called Sol Invictus, the latter being very interested in reincarnation and its realization, but the most important thing was to create the first vampire on Earth. This could only be achieved on November 13, 2022. This date, analyzed in numerology, means $1+3+1+1$, and the year 2022 results in the number of the devil, 666. When Ion had the personal graphic exhibition. Then the information started to appear, and the success of his time travel because the energies of the other dimension merged with this one through the lines of the exhibited drawings. The

presence of the devil on Earth is from now on. But the devil wants Ion here. Not in the year 806. For this to be achievable, you will help me, Commissioner. You will request the archive of all documents discovered in the year 806, you will study, analyze, and discover the date and location of the portal because you have a very clear thread to investigate. After you make this discovery, we will meet in person, and I will reward you. Otherwise, you will bear the consequences. That is, death.

- Is this Ion the Antichrist? the Commissioner asked with a trembling voice.

- These are questions to which I cannot give you a clear answer, Commissioner. You need to go to Radu's office and in the top left drawer, you will find a bronze pendant 2000 years old. It belongs to the Sol Invictus cult. Take it and wear it around your neck to be able to locate and communicate further. Saying this, the hologram of the priest became invisible. The Commissioner goes up to the floor where Radu's office is located and takes the pendant from the top left drawer, putting it around his neck and heading home.

MALEMBOCH, JANUARY 1, 806 - 11:00 PM

Arrived in Malemboch, Ion, disguised as Professor Arion, headed towards the house where the merchant who could sell him the requested herbs lived. He tied the horse and knocked on the door, surprised to see that it was open, and a woman answered.

- Good day, I'm looking for your husband, said Professor Arion. Please give him this letter and coin from me. Saying this, the Professor handed the woman a paper on which the emblem of Purgatory Ink was drawn, along with the Pore coin.

After a few minutes, the merchant appeared.

- Please come in! I've prepared in two containers the 60 units of substances you requested. But I'll tell you something very important. They must not be touched by daylight; otherwise, they will lose their properties, and the portal between worlds will not work.

At this moment, Ion realizes a crucial thing, namely that all members of the Ink Purgatory Order are preparing a time travel to the year 2023. He just needs to find out when and where this will be possible and be ready for his return home.

To make this possible, he needed to draw the portal and its location, placing it in a safe place to be discovered many years later by those who wanted to activate it and help him return safely with the members of the Purgatory Ink. But to do this, he had to find out where this location was. Ion took the containers with the requested materials, mounted his horse, and galloped towards the Citadel where the Order had its base. Arriving in the morning, he handed the herbs to Marius, who, in turn, gave them to the alchemist to prepare the magical substance.

Ion was aware that he needed to reach the alchemist's room to examine his notebooks and discover the location of the portal. While the alchemist worked, Ion sneaked into the room, browsing the notes in the library. Among the parchments found, one drew his attention: a map of the White Citadel and its surroundings, with a stone circled near the citadel, called the "Fog Stones," indicating the portal sketched in the cave within this location. He found it.

Among the documents in the alchemist's room were also the five drawings carefully placed in a folder, the ones used for the temporal transfer ritual from the year 2022 to 806. They emitted a blue aura. A door creaks. It was the alchemist, coming towards his room, where Ion was. Ion hears him, grabs the drawings and the map indicating the portal's location, opens the window, and becomes invisible, riding his horse towards the White Citadel. It was the morning of January 2, 806.

To avoid being affected by the sunlight, Ion transformed into Vera's appearance, heading to the bishop's residence to tell him the whole truth and explain the danger society faced due to this Purgatory Order. He knew that without those drawings, the portal couldn't be activated, so he had to find the perfect hiding place for them. It was clear that he had become a traitor to Purgatory, and the punishment for treason was death. But how can you kill a vampire like Ion? Simple. By exposing him to the sun in his original form or killing a form he would have. So he was in danger.

The members of the Order only knew the appearances of Vera and Professor Arion; those of Radu and Cristian had not been revealed yet. In conclusion, he could hide.

Arriving at the episcopal palace, Ion in Vera's appearance dismounted and ran to the bishop's room, knocking on the door three times.

- Who is it? asked the bishop.

- It's Vera. I came with very important news, dear bishop. We are all in danger. You must let me in to tell you what's happening.

The bishop opened the door, letting Vera in, who told him about the heinous crime of the governor, where they lived, and how Purgatory Ink took control of the White Citadel's leadership.

- We are in great danger, not just me but the entire community, as this order kills even children in their rituals and shows no remorse, Vera added.

- Are you aware that these are very serious accusations? If what you're telling me is true, it could harm Emperor Charlemagne. We can't let these things unfold on their own. I will go to the palace tomorrow to seek help. This order must be eradicated! We will go to the location where you said they live!

- I will go to search for the cave at the Fog Stones. I need two trustworthy and strong people to come with me.

- Of course. They will wait for you at the exit of the episcopal palace in 30 minutes.

Vera sat on a chair, waiting for the bishop to instruct the men she had asked for, later leaving the episcopal palace together with them, riding in haste towards the cave at the Fog Stones. Arriving there, the three dismounted and climbed to an altitude of 1000 meters, entering the cave. In the middle of that cave was a massive stone device with six symbols engraved, each having a flat surface of the same size as Vera's drawings, placed at the end of a pentagram carved into the stone device. There was also a pedestal with space for a book. Vera asked the two men to guard the cave entrance while she took Ion's appearance, positioned each drawing according to the scheme conceived in the first ritual, sat in the circle in front of the machine, and began to hum the song of Ion and Vera. Before that, she spun several round stones similar to a cipher, selecting the date of January 1, 2023.

The device began to spin at a colossal speed, and a lightning bolt shot out of its top, piercing Ion, making him invisible, and sending him back to the time he came from. The two guards, who had heard a loud noise like a bang during the time travel procedure, got scared. When they approached the device, Ion in Vera's appearance was nowhere to be found, and the drawings had disappeared from the machine's surface. The two, frightened, hurried out of the cave, riding to the episcopal residence to report to the bishop what had happened. The bishop sealed the cave, posting guards to prevent any access.

CHAPTER III

--- UNMASKING ---



A strong light enveloped his face,
With nothing on him, only bareness,
And he became almost invisible,
Traveling through time, unpredictable.
Towards the world that awaited him,
To reappear, like a miracle.
But when he felt that time had stopped,
Traveling through the wave of light,
In a forest, he ended up,
Under the dense shadow of trees and moonlight.
And his eyes were opened
To see the sufferings of the world,
Through mystical windows,
Women, children, and wizards killed,
And ravens eating their lungs.
But he woke up near the portal,
Holding the AEIOU drawing,
Next to the four asleep,
Waking them one by one,
They began to gather.
From twigs, they made clothes,
Heading home, tired,
Only a few hours since they disappeared
From their common world.

Suddenly, the commissioner's pendant begins to warm up, and the cultist priest appears in the form of a hologram in his police office.

The 5 have arrived through a portal in this reality, Commissioner. The drawings that made time travel possible are with Ion. But due to these journeys, we don't know what powers he has gained. That's why you need to follow Ion and recover these drawings. Keep all this information secret.

- Where is the portal located? asks the commissioner.

- In the cave at Mist Stones, responds the priest. Before going there, find the drawings. When you discover its location, warm up the pendant so I know you'll call me. The same pendant you're wearing. I also wear it in 806, and when you heat it, I will feel it around my neck, and I will drink a solution that will induce a deep sleep, so I can appear in front of you as I am now. Saying this, the priest had become invisible.

- „Hm," thought the commissioner, I need to contact Ion, Vera, Professor Arion, Cristian, and Radu as soon as possible and recover those drawings.

The commissioner dialed the phone numbers of the five, introducing himself and inviting them to a discussion at the police headquarters the next day at 9 am.

The 5 communicated immediately among themselves, meeting on the evening of January 1, 2023, at the terrace of the bar "Joyful Sparrow" to agree on what to tell the commissioner, knowing that their phones were monitored, being very cautious in their conversations.

- Ion, where are the drawings? asked the library manager.

- All the drawings have disappeared, and only one remains. AEIOU. I buried it in the ground not far from home.

- Very well. Do not tell anyone the location.

After deciding what to tell the commissioner, they shared each one's experience and feelings when they were in Ion's body in 806. Each of these friends of Ion said they felt like they were in a dark room with 5 circular openings, and on the surface of each, there were drawings used in the ritual. Still, above all, in the old language, they could see the explanation of each drawing separately, letters seemed to flow floating in the air and emitted a bluish color. This way, they all learned the secret of the AEIOU drawing, which predicts the future. The connection of the spirals drawn by the raven on the surface of this drawing is closely related

to the prophecy of the priest from the Purgatory of Ink to create the first existing vampire on Earth. They realized that not necessarily the story circled by the raven's beak is the most important, but the number of loops created by it, 11 in number. The significance of this number in numerology symbolizes revelation and clairvoyance focused on inspiration and self-surpassing. A fact that certifies the truth about the narrative in this drawing, and the others being just access keys to activate it, to later be used to activate the portal from the Mist Stones.

Sitting at the table and discussing with Radu, Professor Arion, the Library Manager, and Vera, Ion suddenly vomited. While vomiting, Ion lowered his head, accidentally touching the slightly chipped coffee cup with his cheek, which scratched him a little on the face, a wound that healed in a few seconds as if it had not happened. Seeing what was happening and to be able to see if it was true for them, Vera took a knife out of her bag and cut the fingers of Radu, Professor Arion, and Cristian, being able to see that their wounds also healed a few seconds after the incision. The 5 had healing superpowers.

- We can think about this after we talk to the commissioner and see what intentions he has and what he knows," said Ion. "See you at the police headquarters tomorrow at 8:30.

The 5 friends got up from the table and each went home. Ion arrived home, questioned by his mother where he had been missing for 2 days. Of course, he avoided telling her the truth not to be considered crazy, explaining to his mother that he had been involved in a research project and had to stay and work in a laboratory, where he also slept.

- But seriously, couldn't you call me to tell me where you are? I worried about you, said the artist's mother.

- Excuse me, Mom, it won't happen again, said Ion, lying down in bed and sleeping until the next day.

That night, the moon in the sky was large and red, as if foreshadowing something bad. Monday, January 2, 2023, was a crucial day for the 5 because they had to give explanations to the commissioner at the police headquarters. Ion turned all night, unable to rest properly, thinking about what he would tell the commissioner and how he would do it, to find out his intentions and be able to figure out whose side he would be on. Ion dressed, washed, ate, and went to the institution where he was called.

Arriving at the police headquarters in the morning, the 5 friends sat in the waiting room, entering the commissioner's office one by one, giving explanations as agreed the previous evening. Namely, they were part of a scientific research project focused on witchcraft.

- I would like to know more details, the commissioner told Ion, especially related to the location of a time-traveling portal. I know what this is about, but I listened to all of you to see how far the lie can go. There's no point in hiding anymore, Ion. Please tell me how this portal works and the location of the drawings. My intentions regarding this matter are not malicious. I can guarantee that.

- Mr. Commissioner, something terrible will happen if the Purgatory of Ink manages to travel through time from the year 806 to 2023.

- What exactly can happen, other than claiming what belongs to them?

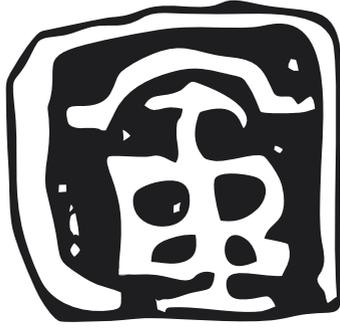
- They will kill me for betrayal, Mr. Commissioner, said Ion, lighting a cigarette eagerly.

- Ion, you are the only person who knows how to interpret the AEIOU drawing because you drew it in the year 806. Please tell me what it is about. What will happen? I know that drawing predicts the future. What should we expect?

- Mr. Commissioner, the moment I drew it, I let my hand flow, meaning the pen drew from my hand without my brain thinking. It was like a divine inspiration, as if coming from another dimension. Although Marius drew it, I had the same feelings as if it had been graphically executed by me. You should know that 20 hours in the year 806 is actually an hour in the year 2023. In practice, 80 hours have passed, equivalent to 3 and a half days in that world where I was, but here in 2023, only four hours and a few minutes have passed. I am surprised that you were able to notice our disappearance, considering the time spent in this whole process in this reality was only a few hours.

- The museum guard alerted the authorities when he saw what was happening on the surveillance camera, the commissioner said, taking another sip of coffee. Here is my business card, Ion. Please notify me of any changes or transformations in your condition.

Ion took the business card, stood up, and signaled to his friends to leave the police headquarters. Outside the building, the library manager invited everyone to his office to talk. Arriving at the library, the 5 comfortably settled into the armchairs and sofa in Cristian's office.



Ion drew the graphic symbol of his personal monogram from the year 806, showing it to the others, saying:

- Only where this symbol appears, the drawing is visionary. As you can see at the top of the monogram, there is the Omega symbol representing the end. Strangely, I have an incredible thirst for blood. I thought I was getting back to normal, but it seems I'm stuck with these symptoms. From what I remember, Marius said I would have to feed on human blood once every 4 days, or else the body will degrade.

- Me too! I crave blood, said Vera.

- And me, said Professor Arion. Surely Radu and the library manager have the same symptoms. Do I understand that we have all become vampires? What's strange is that sunlight doesn't affect us, but the thirst persists and intensifies more and more. We somehow need to have access to the blood bank at the County Hospital.

- I know someone who can guarantee access, said Ion. We won't have to kill anyone this way. I feel very healthy, but the main problem is not that. It's the Purgatory of Ink. In the year 806, they know the location of the portal but still don't have access to it because it is sealed by the bishop, as I revealed them. Moreover, the AEIOU drawing is with me. But since it involves two worlds from different times, there is a possibility that this drawing will be created again by Marius, especially to use this portal. And if they manage to pass through the portal, they will become immortal.

- It seems we owe this to you, said Cristian. And it seems that the ritual of the Sol Invictus cult did not create the only vampire on earth but the only vampires, meaning us, in case the Purgatory of the Brush fails to pass through the portal to come here. But as time passes very quickly in the year 2023 compared to that dimension, we expect them to be here

at any moment.

Time passed, precisely 5 months, and no sign of the commissioner or the Purgatory of Ink. Everything evaporated as if it had never been existed. The only issue is that the 5 friends need to drink a glass of human blood every week to keep their bodies in good condition and avoid degradation. The relationship with the blood bank assistant at the county hospital was maintained, as he was paid very well by the five for the received blood. Ion continued his relationship with Vera, who, in the meantime, filed for divorce at the notary. They booked a beautiful place in the mountains, spending an unforgettable weekend. Arriving at Vera's apartment, Ion sat down and said:



- Vera, I have to tell you something very important about our relationship."

- I'm listening, Vera responds.

- Many unpleasant things have happened because of the relationship we had, but that doesn't mean I don't love you. It has affected my image at work; colleagues see me as a marriage destroyer, my relationship with my boss has deteriorated, and not to mention my mother. Yes, my mother, who is totally against our relationship. After a while of us being together, we felt amazing. But as time passed, your dependency on me intensified, insisting on meeting more often and even discussing the idea of moving in together. It's normal to think that way because that's what true love means. But my mother is 78 years old. I can't leave her alone, and besides, I haven't told you this because you might consider it an insult, but my mother pointed out that there is a 13-year age difference between you and me. Quite significant, considering that when you reach 70, I'll be 57, a difference that will be very noticeable, and from 70 onwards, health problems begin, and most of the time, instead of spending it on vacations, we'll spend it in hospitals. Not to mention that a colleague came to me and said your husband looks very bad, disfigured lately, probably from alcohol or the troubles I involved him in. It's not ethical and moral because I work with him, and I don't want to feel guilty for your divorce and create moral obligations. I just want to tell you that everything started the moment I found your husband in your apartment in slippers, taking out the trash while I was at your door, and you text me that you're busy. I can barely take care of myself; soon, I'll have difficulties with my mother, and you want something very serious from me. Even marriage, as you elegantly mentioned that you would lose your right to stay in the country through divorce, which was a classy way of saying, 'marry me.' I am not an advocate for such things. So, we will have to part ways, and each will go their own way. Maybe we won't talk for a while. I love you because I have never met anyone in my life so kind and offering so much unconditional love."

- You left me speechless, Vera said, bursting into intense tears. I thought you really loved me, but you never did.

- Yes, I loved you, and I still love you. But, as I told you, our relationship is affecting my life, both professionally and personally.
- That's because you are very impressionable.
- My dear, I want to recite a poem to you.
- I'm listening, Vera responds.

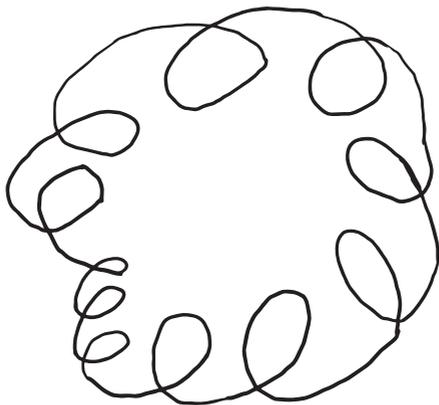
SAD SEPARATION

It's fire and burns smoldering in the ember of pleasures
 Extinguished with holy water around the aura of mysteries
 Struck with a sword on the crown, letting flow
 All the evil thoughts and hatred of others
 But, most of all, the fear to catch up with us
 In the quiet of loneliness, to shatter
 Everything I couldn't hold
 And my face, which begins to cry again
 Passing through that smoldering fire
 Letting my torment pass
 In the somber suffering in the end
 Waiting for a divine sign
 That evening will come and it will flow
 With tears and with wine.

- Am I to understand that you're going to drink?
- Not by far what you think, Ion responds. I'm going to drink until I don't know myself.

Saying this, he gets up from his chair and leaves Vera's apartment, heading home. Once at home, he takes out the sketch drawn by the crow with its beak on the surface of the AEIOU drawing and studies it carefully, thinking that those spirals forming a continuous line may highlight something very clear about matter. Specifically, that there are multiple parallel worlds in other dimensions in which we coexist in both but have different roles in each, which is why Ion thinks that a plastic lighter is contained in the same matter in another dimension but has other properties. Probably, the plastic from the lighter he has in front of him now is in a tree in the other dimension. This justifies why certain elements disappear and appear sometimes because they actually rotate along the axis of these dimensions. A

plausible theory that thoroughly and logically justifies the contour that the crow made with its beak on the AEIOU drawing, realizing that traveling into the past is impossible, as that would mean if you were to kill your father, we would cease to exist. So the only plausible theory Ion thinks of is that of similar worlds in other dimensions.



-But what happens at the intersection of these spirals? Ion wonders. We humans only measure the period in which we exist on Earth based on the sun's rotational movements. But this matter exists in space and time in both dimensions only at the intersection points of this line, which is why aspects and moments that will happen in both dimensions are highlighted. So, in practice, I didn't travel back in time to 806; I accessed another dimension, namely the new parallel dimension that is at the intersection of these lines. I need to study the drawing with the overlapping line. The conclusion I've reached is fascinating, and I can observe exactly the description of the present time in which the entire transition I experienced with Vera, Radu, Cristian, and Professor Arion happened. Considering that the old alphabet is read from right to left, the crow's drawing is clearly maintaining the same direction. This is emphasized in the drawing, which depicts the next premonition as a world where we humans will be restricted, and our travel access will be limited, emphasizing in the drawing that it is very dangerous to go outside, through the representation of corpses outside homes and smiling children inside them. The encoded text in the content mentions that this is the beginning. What did destiny want to say with this statement? The beginning of who? Of what?

- Now the overlap of the drawings is justified, a discovery made by Professor Arion, having similarities with the spiral character juxtaposed on the head of the patriarch's portrait in the drawing with the devil. Where are those drawings? Why did only the AEIOU drawing remain with me in this dimension, along with the journey I undertook? Probably the others are in 806. I won't call it a year anymore because time is measured differently in both dimensions anyway. Similarly, the way my 4 friends became one person, namely me with a younger physiognomy, is justified because in the transition through the center of the Earth, their matter becomes part of me in that dimension. Unbelievable! Marius is me, but in that dimension, and he leads the Purgatory of the Tuş there, implicitly leading that world. Their interest is to stay there, not to come to a dimension where they have no influence. Also, the drawing of the citadel as it looks in 2023 but dating from 806 is now justifiable. I have to inform my friends about this discovery.

Saying this, Ion picked up the phone and called his friends, arranging a meeting in the Drummer's Square in the citadel, where he told them about this theory he discovered, but not before digging up the AEIOU drawing from the ground and taking the spiral sketch to show people what it's all about.

- It's very interesting what you're saying, said Professor Arion. A piece of matter that exists simultaneously in other dimensions but with different properties. Very interesting!

Suddenly, the commissioner appeared.

- Good day. I understand you have something important to discuss, otherwise the five of you wouldn't have gathered here.

- That's right, Commissioner, said Ion, taking the AEIOU drawing behind him, trying to hide it from the curious gaze of the commissioner, but without success.

- I would like to see that drawing too, said the commissioner.

Feeling cornered with the drawing in his folder, Ion ran towards the exit from the citadel's trenches, but didn't get far because there a police car was waiting, and the officers asked him to get into the back seat without causing any problems, then headed to the police headquarters, where he was invited to wait in the commissioner's office, being brought coffee while waiting for him to appear. After a few minutes, the commissioner showed up, saying:

- For several months, I have been following you to understand exactly what is happening. I want to help you. And to be more explicit, I know exactly what it's about. Please tell me the location of the portal, and let's go there to study this issue.

- You have no idea how dangerous what you want to do is, said Ion. By helping Purgatory of Ink, you will only put all our lives in danger.

- I will make sure everything will be fine. Trust me; someone wants to talk to you. You know him well, said the commissioner while rubbing the pendant with his right hand, warming it so that Marius could appear as a hologram.

After a few seconds, Marius appeared in the commissioner's office, saying:

- Ion, I see that you are very surprised to see me. Don't be frightened; for now, we don't intend to come into your world, but I want to explain very clearly what is this world where the Purgatory of Ink is located.

- I'm listening carefully, said Ion, sitting on a chair in the commissioner's office, lighting a cigarette, looking curiously at the hologram of Marius, waiting for the response.

Marius crossed his hands over his chest, saying:

- 20 years ago, you created an account in a virtual metaverse, on a computer in the internet network, as a second life where you created an avatar, a human character you dressed as you wanted, gave a name, and over time you created a story. That story is us, Marius said in a whisper, bowing his head.

- I don't understand; be more explicit, said the commissioner while Ion dropped the cigarette from his hand due to emotion.

- Over time, in that metaverse, your name became Mysterious Art, meeting a woman belonging to the bloodline of the oldest vampires, who transformed you into one. Later, you presented yourself to the Paradis clan, where you have remained faithful to Queen Luna to this day.

- I remember, said Ion. There, I invented the Pore currency and created a bank with those units.

- That's right. But the most important thing is that before reaching that metaverse, the dimension, as you prefer to call it, you were part of another, where you were called Marius. There, you founded an advertising agency called Painting Angels, which had phenomenal success. Your paintings became famous and sold for a lot of gold in the

largest galleries. You had so much money that you created your own cemetery and staged your own funeral to see who your friends were and who weren't. But that virtual world closed, and Marius's spirit followed you into this metaverse where I am now. Mysterious Art exists here, living your ideas and creations from this real world through the spirit of Marius, who is only free when you are not connected, otherwise, he must fulfill what his creator, you, plans, being able to live his first state of aggregation of the information that you are familiar with. You were an artist in all these dimensions, Ion. Marius, meaning me, is your creation transited from a metaverse where the apocalypse came to a world you had the chance to get to by traveling through the Earth's interior towards us and returning through that portal to the world you are in now, which you call real. The fact that you got here, when you returned, you obtained some of the abilities you have in this virtual world. Namely immortality, supported by human blood.

- Is there a possibility to stop this blood thirst?

- Of course, but for this aspect, you need to return through the portal to us, to activate the amulet of infinity that you will wear around your neck when you travel back to the real world.

- Everything is connected. Now I realize that I created Vera, Professor Arion, Radu, and the library manager characters. I just need to figure out who each of them is. In that metaverse, they are called The Last Cigarette, The Fantastic Butterfly, Graphic Artist, and Olivia the Worn. Most likely, The Last Cigarette is Radu, because he managed to quit smoking. Olivia the Worn is the library manager, Graphic Artist is Professor Arion, and Vera is The Fantastic Butterfly. I'm sure of that. Together with them, I created the Purgatory of Ink, but it was deleted by the company that created the metaverse. Oddly enough, the same company created another virtual platform that it sold, where I created the Virtual Cultural Center. There, I am called John. In that world, I hid a vegetarian recipe that heals any type of allergy. I obtained it through a trade with a person from a spiritual organization in exchange for a book dedicated to me by a great Belgian psychoanalyst, given as a gift when I organized the Centenary of Psychology. I need to go back for the amulet of infinity. Saying this, Ion stood up and headed for the exit with the drawing in his hand, but the office door was closed.

-This justifies the fact that I could change my appearance into Vera's or the others' physiognomy because those characters were created by me. Why is the door closed, Commissioner? I would like to leave.

- Please come near the computer on the desk, and I'll show you what the amulet you need to bring looks like.

Ion approached the commissioner's desk and looked at the infinity amulet.

- The ruby in this amulet is similar to the ruby on the time-traveling portal. The location of that portal must be in the well-guarded history museum, said Ion. In fact, it's the same ruby that, if removed from the portal and fixed on this amulet, cancels the blood thirst. The one who wears it will be able to travel to the dimension where the sacred tree exists, according to Marius, and as long as the wearer has it around their neck. It is a very precious element, and that's why this journey I will undertake will be to find this object and bring it here. But surely you won't let me keep it, being such a valuable artifact materialized from numerical codes resulting in pixels, into a real object.

- Agreed, replied the commissioner. Please tell me where that portal is so that we can move it to the museum.

- That portal is connected to a dimension I have never managed to enter, Commissioner. But it is highlighted in the AEIOU drawing and reflects a period from the year 1899. It's quite wild there, and the problem is that if I am killed or die for various reasons, there might be a possibility that I become a spirit. In this way, I will have to live independently of my actions in that metaverse. That's why, to obtain the reverse, meaning to be able to return to this real world, I will have to find the amulet of infinity, which is in that dimension, Commissioner. And I think I know what I will have to do. I will access that dimension through the portal, reach there, and the name I will choose will be Black Ink. I will try to contact existing people in that dimension, create certain connections to get to know the activities and customs of that world in detail, to find the location where I could find the amulet of infinity and bring it here. The problem is that if I die there, I will have to travel through the portal again and contact the company that controls that metaverse to create a new character; otherwise, I will have to exist there only in the form of a vampire, which will force me to commit many crimes, and the objective of the existing purpose will be lost. So the only solution if this happens will be to return to the real world and

tell you the location of the portal to send a well-prepared army to collaborate with the authorities there, hoping to find that amulet, depending only on the understanding power of those people.

- What are you waiting for?

- I'm leaving now, Commissioner. Can I take Jerry with me? For protection.

- Of course. Jerry!

- Yes, Commissioner?

- You will go with Ion to the location of the portal to reach a dimension from the year 1899. You will protect him with your life. There's no time for explanations, but once you get there, Ion will tell you what it's about. This way, I need to know the location of the portal to protect you.

- We're leaving now, Commissioner.

Saying that, Ion and the commissioner's subordinate, Jerry, headed towards the Stones of Mist where the portal was, with the AEIOU drawing in hand. Arriving in front of the portal, Ion positioned the drawing in the space allocated with perfectly carved dimensions in stone. The drawing began to glow until in front of the eyes of the two, nothing could be distinguished except a very strong orange color. Their bodies fell into a deep sleep, and when the image began to take shape from that color, Ion was already there in the year 1899, with the AEIOU drawing in hand at the edge of a dried-up forest near which there were six lakes close to each other, each in the shape of a diamond, but no sign of Jerry.

Dressed scantily, impoverished, with 10 Pore coins in his pocket, he headed towards the city in the distance, where he reached an imposing building that, by Cerneală Neagră's deduction, would be the city hall. But his stomach began to create hunger problems, so with the money he had, he bought a bow with arrows, went to the field, killed a deer, and presented himself in the Black City to find someone to sell it to in order to buy something to eat and drink. He was confused, bewildered, didn't know where to start, especially since Jerry was somewhere around, and he had no idea how to get in touch with him, losing all hope that he might still be alive. After satisfying his hunger and thirst, he headed towards the first person standing in front of a salon with a coffee in hand. Arriving in front of him, Black Ink asked:

- Good day. Have you seen a stranger in this town?

- Only you, sir, the man replied, taking another sip of his coffee. You look very poor, he said, glancing at Black Ink's ragged and dusty clothes.
- Yes, that's true. I've just arrived in this town after a very long journey from a distant country.
- And what brings you here? the curious local asked.
- To start a new life, sir.
- I don't think you've chosen the right town, sir...
- Ink. Black Ink is my name.
- Mr. Ink. Look, there's a mine not far from this town. I'm willing to buy a shovel and all the necessary tools for you to search and bring me rare metals. I'll pay you for that.
- You're very generous, but I would like to go to the town hall first to register, Black Ink said, hoping to get rid of this man as quickly as possible.
- Of course. The town hall is right in front. That large building.

Black Ink headed towards the town hall, where a lady at a counter was shouting:

- Next!

Approaching her, Ink introduced himself, obtained that identification document which cost 5 Pore coins, and bought a hunting permit for one day to make some money by selling deer, later selling them to the butcher.

- Hmm, it's very strange that they use the currency of Purgatory of Ink here. But it has a very low value compared to the one from the year 806. I need to somehow find out the location of the amulet, but for that, I need a map of the entire region, Black Ink thought. He went to a store and bought one. Looking at the shelves, he noticed that this town had no publications, realizing it was an exceptional opportunity to create a newspaper through which he would get to know the world and situations around him, leading him to find the amulet of infinity. In the store, a very elegant man with a brick-red jacket entered, asking the seller for three cigars. Black Ink approached him, saying:

- Don't judge a man by his appearance, sir. I can offer you something that no one in these lands has had.

After buying the cigars, the man glanced at Black Ink curiously, wondering what might be inside.

- It's about a portrait of you, in exchange for a few coins so I can buy some clothes as well, Ink said.

- You made me very curious. Are you Mr. Ink, newly registered in this town, am I right? I am Marshal Solomon Kane. If you are an artist, know that we need something like that in the Black Town. For that, I will provide you with a roof over your head and an occupation to earn a living.

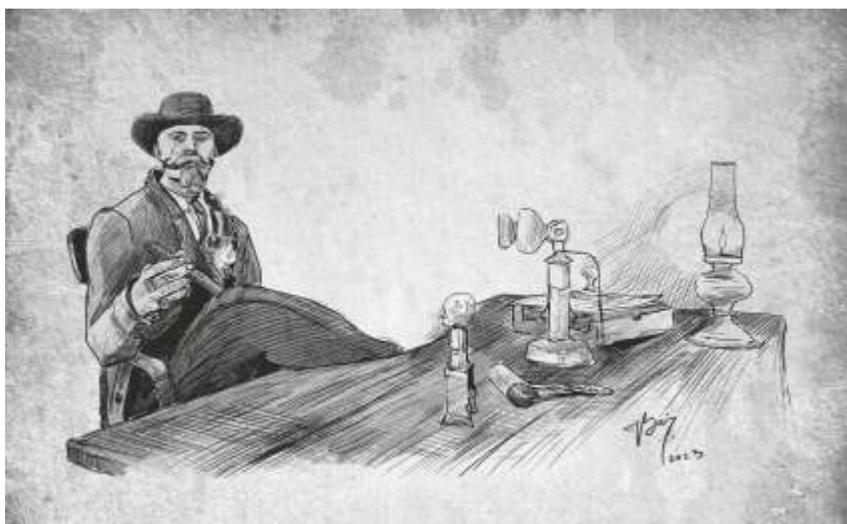
- What exactly do I need to do, Marshal?

- Take ID photos, Mr. Ink. I'll connect you with Mayor Jimmy Carter, who will provide you with all the necessary tools.

Black Ink's eyes began to sparkle with happiness. He was on the right track to achieve his goal. But he had no idea what would happen to him along the way. In no way should anyone find out that he had traveled through that portal to the Bad Lands from another dimension. Now with a registered name, he took the keys to the art studio from the marshal, thanked him, and headed to the town bank to deposit the AEIOU drawing in a safe. Then he went to Marshal Kane's office, who was waiting for him for a portrait. Black Ink took a pen with ink and a sheet of paper from the marshal's desk, starting to draw. After three hours of work, he handed over the drawing.

- This is it, Marshal, he said, handing the sheet to the respectable man.

- Incredible, Mr. Black Ink! I'll frame it as quickly as possible. Here are 500 coins. It should help you get started.



- Allow me to escort you to the exit, said the marshal, but not before handing to Black Ink a map of the Black Town with all the available locations.

- Of course. I'll go back to the studio you provided.

Saying this, Black Ink left the marshal's office, heading towards the art studio. Before walking out the door, Ink heard the marshal shouting:

- One more thing, sir! If your business goes well, I invite you to the left side of the town, Strawberry Peninsula, for a festive meal with the mayor and later for a poker game if you're interested.

- I will gladly honor that invitation!

Days passed, and Black Ink began to get to know as many people as possible in the Black Town, as he was the town's photographer, taking ID photos for everyone. Until one day, a very elegant gentleman entered Black Ink's studio, telling him that he would provide everything if he created a newspaper for the region of Bad Lands, and that he would pay for each copy as much as he requested. So, Black Ink started his career as a journalist, fulfilling his dream of creating this publication, which he had thought about to achieve his goal of finding the amulet of infinity. Days went by, and Black Ink started writing, reaching out to the sheriff to gather information about what was happening in these lands, to be highlighted in the press and, of course, to follow the trail of this artifact.

Exploring the area and reaching the mountains, mr. Ink discovered an abandoned house, full of skeletons. On the table in front of which a human skeleton sat on a chair, there was a book on which a skull was placed. Black Ink opened the book, and to his surprise, on the first page, he saw a drawing of the amulet of infinity. Below it was written in an ancient language, describing how the ritual would be performed to become immortal. Deciphering the language as he knew it, Cerneală Neagră's interest was to find this amulet and publish it on the front page of the newspaper "Vestea" (The News) in the hope that someone had found it and could buy it and leave peacefully from this dimension and return to the commissioner.

After a very short time, a lieutenant entered the artistic studio of the Black Town, telling to Ink that he had found a clue that would lead him to the location of this amulet from the newspaper. Both set off for that place located in an old mill in the rocks of the Bad Lands.

VESTEA

nr. 3/1899



1011500 31104 38 1131461 1181301 40
1 451134 11104 40 1011 1111111 01-31 1130151131
1111115 115011155 3013

181, 11111 11 1111, 1118 501 3511 113110 0 11111 38
11 11 1118 11 501 11511130 11 18 3111111 113111
38 11111 11 11311111 11181301 111111 10 11313018
3111111 313011011155 0 130 35111 30 111805 501
1111300 40 1130 1111311118 11 301511311 150 1301 30
18 111 1111311118 10 311 3111 111311
111813 3011 113111813011 11 113013011011111
1111118 111111100

Ziar tiparit de Cernoata Neagra / redactor: Cernoata Neagra





With the book in hand, he reached the mill, and the lieutenant, together with Black Ink, studied the wheel turned by the water, carefully looking at its supporting hub. They could observe something shiny and red embedded in its end. It was the Amulet! Mr. Ink couldn't believe his eyes! He had indeed found it!

- How much do I owe you? Black Ink asked the sheriff's lieutenant.

- 6000 pore coins, and the amulet will be yours, Mr. Ink

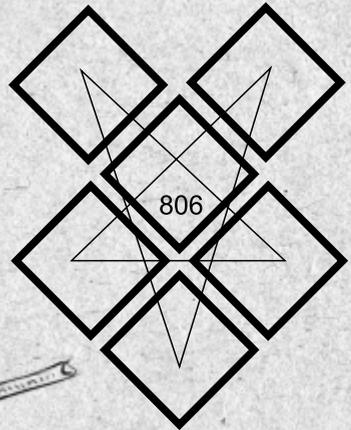
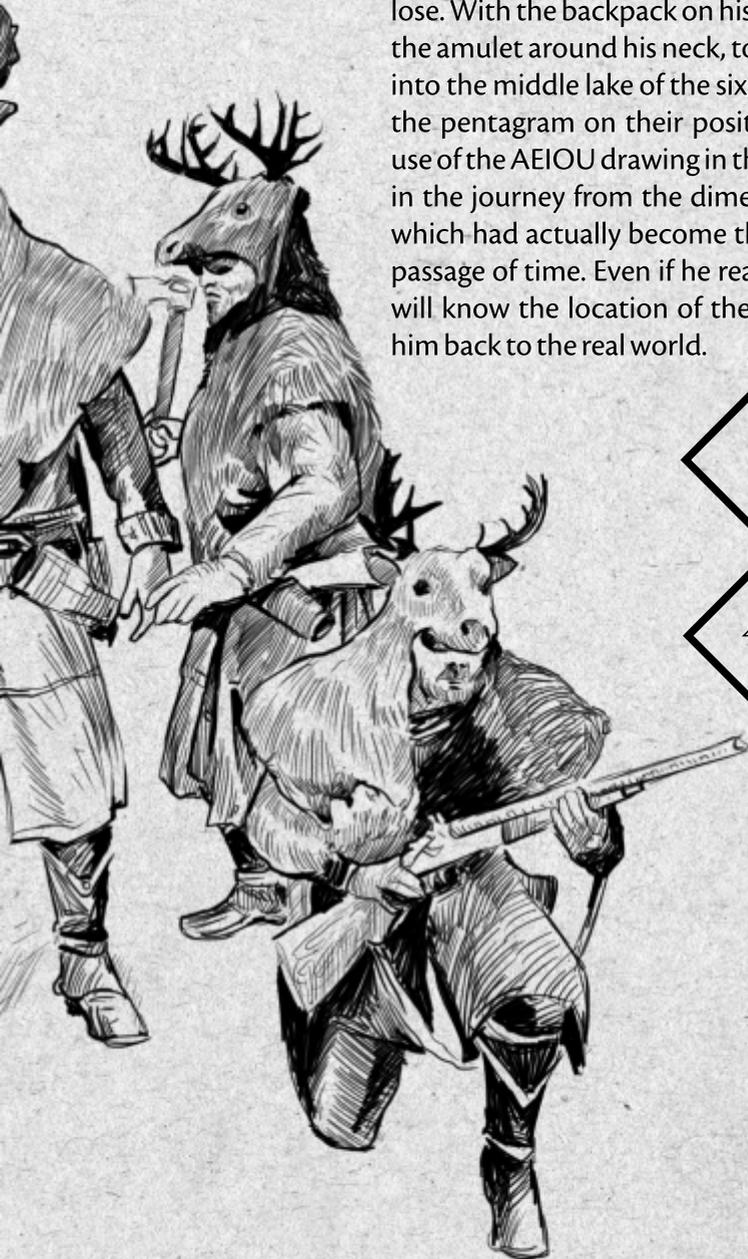
- I don't have that many coins, but we'll sort it out quickly. Saying this, he sadly handed the amulet to the lieutenant to keep until he could gather the coins to pay for it. He hurriedly headed to the bank vault in the Black City to retrieve the AEIOU drawing and prepare for his departure to the real world through the portal at the edge of that dry forest, inside one of the diamond-shaped lakes. Mr. Ink wrote an important announcement in the newspaper, informing all citizens of the Dark Territories that through his studio, he could draw portraits for a beautiful memory or a valuable investment. This announcement proved to be very successful, as his first clients had already appeared, and Mr. Ink managed to collect the coins requested by the sheriff's lieutenant by drawing portraits of the citizens.



It was a real success, and after paying the lieutenant, Black Ink took the Infinite Amulet, the book containing the ritual in an ancient language, and the AEIOU drawing. He hastily headed towards the portal leading to the real world. He was happy because the end of this adventure was in his favor. But where was Jerry? He probably ended up in another dimension due to a miscalculation. Who knows? There was no time to waste. Black Ink stood before the lakes. Which one was the right lake?



In front of the lakes, 5 bandits from the Brotherhood gang appeared. There was no time to lose. With the backpack on his back, Black ink placed the amulet around his neck, took a risk, and plunged into the middle lake of the six, overlaying a sketch of the pentagram on their positions. He deduced the use of the AEIOU drawing in the central part, utilized in the journey from the dimension of the year 806, which had actually become the year 808 due to the passage of time. Even if he reaches there, at least he will know the location of the portal that will bring him back to the real world.



While descending into the depths of the lake, Black Ink began to visibly dematerialize until his body completely disappeared. The five members of the Brotherhood gang also jumped one by one into this lake, finding themselves in the year 808, wet, at the edge of the Mist Stones portal, surrounded by the bishop's soldiers. They were all tied up and taken to the underground dungeons of the episcopate, imprisoned in a cell.

What seemed very strange to Ion was that all groups of people he encountered were organized in groups of five. The Purgatory of Ink in the year 808 consisted of five, the Brotherhood gang in the year 1899 numbered five, in the real world Ion, together with the friends with whom they performed the ritual, amounted to five, five lakes, five corners of the pentagram, five avatars in that metaverse. Surely, this number held special significance, closely linked to all dimensions he traveled through, signifying the limits of human existence and its connection to the universe, a concept the ancient Greek philosophers ascribed meaning to, stating that in the human being, there are five basic principles: the body, the psyche, the animal soul, the divine spirit, and intelligence. In the book that Black Ink found in the Rele Territories, alongside the drawing of the amulet, five other drawings were present, used in the ritual that facilitated the journey through the portal between dimensions.

The bishop approached the cell where all six were imprisoned, holding in one hand the book found by Ion under the alias Black Ink and in the other hand the amulet, asking Ion where he got these things. Ion explained to the bishop that everything that was happening was much more complicated, revealing that he is Vera, the one who discussed the Ink Purgatory and unveiled the conspiracy and the portal location. Ion insisted that the bishop must believe him, or they would have no chance.

- Do you have any proof? the bishop asked.
- Of course! Saying this, Ion recounted to the bishop about the governor's murder, the crow, and the portrait Vera drew, as well as the governor's proposal to draw illustrations for a PORE each.
- Quickly open the cell and release him, commanded the bishop to the soldiers present. Follow me, please. Saying this, the bishop headed towards his room in the episcopal palace, sitting in the middle of the room, pensive, wondering how such a thing could be possible, asking Ion to explain everything from the beginning.

Ion asked the bishop if the backpack he came through the portal with contained the amulet, the black book with drawings, and the ritual in the old language, as well as the AEIOU drawing. The bishop handed him all the items, except for the main drawing, which was inside this black book along with the other drawings between its pages.

- How long has it been since Vera left through the portal? Ion asked the bishop.

- 2400 hours, which means 6 years, more precisely 5 months in your world, which means 16 days have passed here compared to one day in your world. So, it is the year 812, Ion, the bishop replied. For 6 years, I have guarded and monitored this portal incessantly, awaiting your return. In the meantime, Charles the Great has been informed of this plot. According to your account, he would have only 2 years left to live.

- Yes, Bishop, the records of the times in the dimension I come from mention that Charles the Great will die in the year 814. But it is impossible to be about the real past of your reality because, in this way, if someone travels through the portal and kills my ancestors, my existence would no longer be in the world where I come from. It's a paradox. This is justified due to the fact that the Ink Purgatory in 1899 was an organization for political and police investigation and analysis with its own bank.

- 1899? the curious bishop asked.

- Yes, it is the dimension where I discovered the amulet and this black book with the ritual that will cure me of vampirism in the real world.

- Vampirism?

- When I arrive in the dimension I come from with this amulet around my neck, I will no longer have the thirst for blood that keeps me alive, and I will be able to live like a normal person.

- Interesting. Continue.

- There I became immortal; any wound heals quickly, and if this is discovered, I will be a subject of study for some researchers. But I found that in every dimension I traveled, I will meet myself. In the case of this world, Marius, who is the leader of the Purgatory of Ink. I told you about the location of the fortress where they live and perform rituals, but I doubt that place is still inhabitable after my betrayal.

- I have been there. It is a ruin. That place was set on fire and abandoned, and in the underground of that place, I found many human bones, the bishop said. But I have a question. Regarding this text on the first page of the black book that describes the ritual to achieve immortality

without the thirst for blood with this amulet with a red ruby...

- Yes, I'm listening...

- Allow me to read you the text, although I am convinced that you also speak the Old Language and have already read it. Saying this, the bishop reads the text from the Black Book page: "With this amulet, immortality can be achieved. We have gathered here to perform the following ritual:" *They gather 5 people who will stand face to face, join their hands, and in their center, a sixth person will stand, holding this amulet in hand. The following words will be uttered by the 5 individuals three times: "Immortality in my soul at the cost of your life. May your soul travel to the dimension where the Tree of Eternity exists.*

- Yes, Bishop, I have read this page, which prompted me to start the search for this amulet, resulting in its subsequent discovery. My confusion is that if this Tree of Eternity has not yet been discovered in my world, where I come from in the year 2023, this would mean that this real world from which I come is not a main world, a dimension that reflects everything that happens in other dimensions. Instead, it is just another dimension, and I am only familiar with it, defining it as real because I was born there. The main dimension would be the one where this Tree of Eternity exists, as mentioned in this Black Book and also in a mythic-historical ideology in the world I come from, described as existing in the Garden of Eden between three rivers, two of which no longer exist. When I was in my real world, Bishop, Marius, the leader of the Ink Purgatory, appeared through a pendant from the Sol Invictus cult, telling me that the immortality ritual must be performed here in the dimension where we are now.

- Interesting... in conclusion, we will have to sacrifice 5 people for you to gain immortality and to eliminate the thirst for blood.

- Exactly, and among these people, I must be one of them. I mean, Marius... so we need to capture the five members of the Ink Purgatory and sacrifice them in this ritual.

- It is a difficult problem to arrest them because we do not know where they could be, but we will mobilize all forces to search for them and catch them as soon as possible, bringing them to justice to pay for their wrongdoings.

The bishop stood up from his chair and fell into deep thought. If what Ion told him was true, he could keep the book and the amulet for himself, later traveling to the dimension of the year 2023, finding his own

person there, and performing the immortality ritual. Surely, there was a person from the church there, so it probably wouldn't be hard to find the clone of that dimension.

- Are you okay, Bishop? Ion asked.

- Of course! I will travel to your dimension. I have a mission to accomplish there.

Ion lowered his head, asking the bishop what prompted him to think and act in this way.

- Immortality! the bishop exclaimed. I am the most suitable for this! Saying this, he signaled the guards to arrest Ion, taking the Black Book containing all the drawings and the amulet. He mounted his horse, accompanied by two soldiers, heading to the Mist Stones where the portal was. He put the amulet around his neck and placed the book in the designated space on the stone pedestal of the portal, extending his hands horizontally with his head upwards when the book began to emanate a bluish color with orange rays, performing the magical teleportation effect. Finally, the bishop dematerialized from his dimension, appearing in the year 2023, surrounded and handcuffed upon arrival by the commissioner's policemen. In practice, this immortality ritual could only be performed in the dimension where a clone of the initiator exists.

Ion, when a guard brought him food, jumped on his throat and sucked his blood, feeding himself. He escaped from the bishop's prison, running from the White Citadel to the forest in the cave of the Mist Stones where the portal was, hoping to catch the bishop who had already traveled through it. There, devoid of hope, he knelt down, shouting very loudly as if he had lost everything. With closed eyes in a clear silence where only the drops of water from the cave's ceiling could be heard, a warm and friendly hand rested on Ion's shoulder. He turned his head to see who it was, surprised to see the Lame Singer, Marius, and the other three members of the Ink Purgatory beside him, the guards of the bishop being asleep and lying on the cold ground of the cave.

- So it was meant to be, Ion, Marius said in a whisper. You don't have to be sad because your place has always been here with us. We have already planned the assassination of Charles the Great, and this member you see behind me, Ludovic, will lead it. We needed to get rid of the bishop definitively, and the only solution was to make him travel through the portal. Everything was already planned by us from the beginning.

- The commissioner will take care of the bishop, said the Lame Singer. The Infinity Amulet is in safe hands in the dimension you come from, Ion, as well as the Black Book. Marius's collaboration with the chief commissioner is good, and we will stay in constant contact. He has already informed us about the history of that dimension, which coincides 100 percent with ours. Therefore, we already know the course of history and the future of our society, as well as the actions we need to take to protect ourselves. The Brotherhood gang, which is still imprisoned in the bishop's cellars, is us, but from another dimension, as we did not want to involve Vera, Radu, Professor Arion, and Cristian. The latter have recovered as normal people and will be protected by the police led by the chief commissioner, but especially their knowledge will be kept secret because, after the nuclear war, they will be the only survivors who will carry on the human species as they will be locked in a maximum-security bunker. And you will be able to travel in both worlds whenever you wish.

- Nuclear war?

- Yes, you drew that in the AEIOU drawing, said Marius. Given that I think like you, being your clone from another dimension, I have the ability to decipher all the symbolism of your drawings and give continuity to all the transformations highlighted on that paper. Christianity is a monotheistic religion that made a pact with the devil in the year 2007, appearing on the territory of Dacia with the advent of the sun cult, Sol Invictus. They were the ones who first drew the Black Book, which now, its copy, is in the reality where the chief commissioner is.

- And the original?

- In our temple. The copy is created by me after this original and was sent to the dimension of the year 1899, protected by the Brotherhood gang.

- Everything was calculated; they let you recover it because you are the chosen one.

- What about the Infinity Amulet? Who will wear it?

-The commissioner will keep it safe. And it will be worn in turn by your friends to stop their bloodthirst. It will be like a gradual healing. In addition, it can be used alongside the copy of the Black Book made by me to travel in this dimension and back when needed. As for the Tree of Eternity, it is within you, Ion. Becoming immortal, every wound you have will heal, and the organs will regenerate. With you, we will win wars, and the world will be ours. But what is important, you will bring peace wherever you are, and globalization will be beneficial because soon there will be no need for certain people, preserving only the creative and intelligent ones.

---END---



"A good practice is to listen to everyone who has something to say, but it is crucial to retain only what you consider important for yourself."

Constantin Baic (June 8, 1938 - January 1, 2021)

About the AUTHOR

contact: ionutbaic@mail.com

To view my artistic activity, visit my personal website, www.hasura.ro.

I graduated from the School of Arts in Alba Iulia, the University of Arts and Design Ion Andreescu in Cluj Napoca, the Faculty of Graphics (2003), and I have a master's degree from the University of Bucharest in Cultural Management (2007). I am open to new projects, especially those related to culture, literature, art, and graphic design.

My specialization is focused on poster design and illustrative drawing for the press or portraits, created with a graphics tablet in various graphic design programs or in a classical manner. The technique of illustrations and portraits is emphasized solely through lines, bearing similarities to an 18th-century engraving.

Throughout my career, I have collaborated with various publications, creating front-page illustrations and caricatured portraits. I have promoted the University of Bucharest through the creation of graphic materials, the Alba County Council, and currently, I am the graphic designer for the "Augustin Bena" Cultural Center in Alba.

Drawing and graphic design are my way of life. Among the awards I have received, an important one is the Excellence Award for Illustration at the European Newspaper Awards in Vienna in 2009. Notable achievements include graphic materials for the Centenary of Psychology at the University of Bucharest, the Centenary of Romania in Alba Iulia, and last but not least, the Centenary of the Coronation. I also invented a board game about the city of Alba Iulia, www.joculcetatii.ro, and designed and laid out the Tourist Guide for Alba County.



English edition
2024

hasura.ro