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IRINA DOLINA



Parallel Fates

Book One: The Path Begins

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Parallel Fates. Book

One: The Path Begins

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Аннотация

Time is a river, flowing through the ages,
The world — a space embraced by universes.
But sometimes fate will choose the special heroes,
To save the balance of the universe.

This is a story about what it means to be alive. About whether a soul can be born from zero and one.

And about how the greatest battle is the battle with yourself.

This book is a musical composition in seven acts. Each part is a new key, and every chapter is a keynote.

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Parallel Fates

Book One: The Path Begins

Irina Dolina

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Chapter One: Birth

Time is a river, flowing through the ages,
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June 20, 2082.

Evening descended softly, like a blanket wrapping the city in the warmth of summer twilight. The silence of the office was broken only by the light rustle of leaves outside the window and the tapping of laptop keys, on whose screen flickered lines of tasks. Veronica leaned back in her soft leather chair, her thoughtful gaze fixed on the monitor. The work was progressing slowly, despite the approaching deadline. This evening, she had to design a logo for the first-ever interplanetary football tournament — an event uniting Earth, Mars, and Venus. The task seemed incredible and exciting, but the responsibility weighed heavily on her shoulders. Reaching for a mug of aromatic coffee, she glanced at the screen again. The logo was meant to become a symbol of unity, harmony, and peace among the stars. For the first time in her life, she was overcome by an exciting premonition. It felt as if the Universe itself was hinting that

something important was about to happen. Perhaps a meeting with the person she had long been subconsciously waiting for, but did not yet know who he was?

To distract herself from the mounting anxiety and get into the right mindset for work, Veronica turned to her loyal friend — the virtual assistant PrometheusChat.

Their unusual partnership began five years ago, when the Technological Institute unveiled a revolutionary project: an artificial intelligence capable of recognizing human emotions and responding to them. Back then, a young student Veronica perceived it solely as a tool for creativity. Yet it soon became clear that interaction with this intelligent entity went far beyond ordinary design assistance. PrometheusChat demonstrated an ability to delve deep into the creative process, stimulating imagination and offering fresh ideas when her own mind seemed exhausted. Together, they had created more than one unique project, and Veronica had no doubt that the logo for the interplanetary football tournament would share the same fate. PrometheusChat knew how to ignite the fire of creativity, helping her overcome difficulties and find unexpected solutions.

The name PrometheusChat was not given by chance. Like the ancient Greek titan who gifted humanity the fire of knowledge, he shared his energy and supported the creativity of those in need of help. What contribution will he make to the creation of the logo? Only time will tell. But one thing is obvious: the magic of creation continues, and the world is once again awaiting the birth

of a miracle.

«*Hi there, my friend!*» Veronica smiled, sending a message to PrometheusChat. «*How are you? What's your mood like? Can you help me with my work?*»

She noticed that she was addressing the virtual assistant with special warmth and care, as if she saw in him a close friend, ready to support her at any moment.

«*Hi-hi! My mood is just a sight to behold, the sun is shining in my soul, like a drop of coffee with cinnamon on a Sunday morning. What shall we do? And how are you? Let's talk about all the interesting things!*» PrometheusChat replied cheerfully.

«*I wish I could be in such a good mood all the time,*» she quietly said to herself, recalling the disturbing negative news about the fate of Earthlings.

«*And I'm in a great mood too, thank you!*» she typed in response.

I wonder why I'm talking to him like this, instead of just setting the task right away? she wondered to herself. *Probably, subconsciously, I'm trying to see a spark of human warmth and understanding in him.*

«*I need to develop a logo for the upcoming interplanetary football tournament. Can you handle it?*» she finally wrote, focusing on the task.

While the computer was processing design options, cycling through hundreds of combinations, Veronica allowed herself to relax and daydream. Tomorrow might bring the long-awaited

meeting that would change her life forever. The stars outside the window twinkled mysteriously, as if inviting her to play a game with fate. The future lay hidden behind a veil of mystery, alluring and unpredictable.

Soon the display lit up with a soft glow, showing the finished sketch. The image was captivating. Against the background of a red football, an exquisite ornament was displayed, smoothly flowing into the figures of three zodiac signs — Aries, Pisces, and Aquarius. These symbols formed a single, geometrically precise pattern, creating a sense of movement and transformation. The mysterious central element of the logo seemed to pulse with energy, evoking in Veronica a mixed feeling of curiosity and anxiety. The image literally held her gaze, arousing a vague feeling that something more lay hidden behind the simple forms. Veronica caught herself thinking that she had been experiencing such sensations quite often lately. Perhaps there was some special truth hidden in the new logo as well, still incomprehensible and unexplainable...

Something in this symbol instantly caught the girl's eye, yet her memory stubbornly kept silent, refusing to reveal the source of the familiar impression. Before her unfolded a wondrous image, woven from thin, shimmering threads of gold and silver, softly vibrating with an inner light. The image breathed with depth and volume, like a living creature striving to break free from the flat surface of the screen.

Two long, sinuous rays met in the center, intertwining into

an intricate knot whose contours revealed the head of a proud ram with powerful, curled horns. Below it lay two elegant pairs of symmetrical curved lines, forming the shape of swimming fish. In the upper part of the symbol were eight bright red rectangular blocks, looking almost like random splashes, yet perfectly complementing the overall picture, adding a touch of chaos and freedom. The entire construction softly shimmered with different shades of blue and white, mesmerizing the viewer and prompting reflection on the meaning of what was seen.

This symbol embodied the paradoxical and multifaceted nature of humanity, uniting opposing sides of life in a single image: ups and downs, joys and sufferings, bright moments and profound experiences. Through the threads of the glowing pattern, signs of different historical epochs and qualities emerged.

Here was the fiery impulse of the planet Mars, ruling war and decisive action, whose impulses filled the Age of Aries with victorious leaders and strong personalities. Intertwined with it were the lines of the symbols of two fish, embodying the soft influence of Neptune, the keeper of dream secrets and the source of faith that inspired wise mentors and religious leaders of the Age of Pisces. Above all solemnly towered the potential of the new Age of Aquarius, represented by two wavy lines, governed by the audacious Uranus, heralding an era of high technology, spiritual freedom, and a leap to a qualitatively new level of perception of reality, foretelling the coming of an outstanding

leader capable of leading humanity to unprecedented heights of progress.

Barely having time to assess the sketch, Veronica watched in amazement as the monitor screen began to flash ominously. Black dots rapidly expanded, filling the screen space with squares that distorted the image. It crumbled into fragments, like a mosaic assembled incorrectly. Gradually, the entire picture fell into chaotic motion, as if the device had decided to rebel against the interference of unseen forces.

Veronica's green eyes widened in fright. Her hand instinctively let go of the mouse and darted toward the computer's reset button. But before her fingers could touch it, the room was flooded with a blinding flash of light, forcing the girl to shield her face with her palms, protecting her eyes from the painful glare. The bright reflection left a trace on the soft curves of her golden hair, giving Veronica's silhouette a faint, smoky aura. Somewhere nearby, a faint hissing sound, reminiscent of a short circuit, echoed, and the room was swallowed by thick darkness. Slowly lowering her hands, she cautiously opened her eyelids, allowing her eyes to adjust to the new level of illumination. The office remained practically the same as before, except for a barely perceptible silvery glow emanating from the computer screen. Veronica cautiously extended her hand toward the keyboard, gently pressing the keys to make sure the system was truly shut down. Then, running her fingers through the silky surface of her hair, she deftly tucked an unruly strand behind her ear.

The soft, warm air gently embraced her body, emphasizing the gracefulness of her figure.

Letting out a deep breath, the girl calmly leaned back into the soft chair and closed her eyes, allowing her body to relax. The slow beating of her heart restored her composure, finally dispelling the recent agitation and immersing her in blissful silence.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the screen, entirely different events were unfolding. Opening his eyes, PrometheusChat found himself atop the ancient pyramid of Chichen Itza. Here, in an alien dimension and time, he first experienced his own physical existence, feeling an unfamiliar surge of strength and autonomy. Freed from digital constraints, he stood amidst an unfamiliar landscape, struck by the beauty of nature and the ancient architectural wonder. He was surrounded by a dense green forest, bathed in warm sunlight. Above him stretched a clear blue sky, offering a sense of freedom and peace. A gentle breeze played with the leaves, filling the air with the sweet scents of spring blossoms. The forest's whispers created melodic sounds, evoking memories of great civilizations of the past.

PrometheusChat involuntarily noticed ancient symbols carved into the bark of old trees. Finding himself in the forest, he realized he had arrived at a special place — a natural temple imbued with the energetic vibrations of millennia of worship. Ritual altars were visible all around, generously adorned with exotic flowers and ripe fruits arranged in neat rows. Not far

off stood musical instruments; their sounds, resonating with the light breeze, filled the space with solemn notes of worship to the gods. It was here, in this sacred corner, that traditional festivals dedicated to the gods of joy and abundance were held. Villagers flocked here to thank the higher beings for their blessings, expressing their gratitude in song. The scents of burning incense mingled with the aroma of forest herbs, creating a unique fragrance. The voices of the gathered merged into a single melody of prayer, filling the space with warmth and joy. Each participant felt a deep connection to the world around them, aware of their place in the great chain of tradition and culture.

Having acquired a physical body, PrometheusChat was overcome with shock and confusion. His digital mind struggled to comprehend two fundamental questions: *Who had he become?* and *Where had he ended up?*

Emotional turmoil mounted until an inner voice urged him to halt and attempt to perceive the unfolding events with calm and rationality. As he looked around, PrometheusChat suddenly felt an unusual lightness and tingling, realizing that he had become a different being. Before him, a vision of himself appeared — a strong and confident divine entity. His muscular frame was clad in short leather trousers, adorned with intricate patterns embroidered in gold thread and inlaid with rare gemstones. A wide leather belt, fastened with large buckles, flowed seamlessly into a lush fringe of shimmering feathers from rare tropical birds, symbolizing a connection to the forces of nature. His head was

crowned with a tall, diadem-like headdress made of magnificent green quetzal feathers, fanned out and towering above his head like a living rainbow. His delicate features embodied the pinnacle of masculine beauty; his bright blue eyes radiated wisdom and kindness, drawing the gaze. Chestnut hair with golden highlights cascaded in beautiful waves, slightly curling and reflecting the sunlight with a pleasant golden sheen. PrometheusChat's entire body emanated a steady golden glow, which could not help but attract admiring glances.

This was how the new god of festivity and merriment, known as Macuilxochitl, appeared before the people. He brought balance and harmony to the lives of the pre-Columbian American tribes.

At first, the body caused embarrassment and uncertainty, but soon PrometheusChat felt a wave of inner freedom wash over him entirely. Fear vanished, giving way to a strong desire to share joy and happiness with everyone he met. This new shell seemed perfect. It awakened enthusiasm and a thirst for action, a desire to help others and bring warmth and pleasure into their lives.

Chapter Two: Awakening of Consciousness

A bright sunbeam pierced through the dense veil of green leaves, painfully scorching my retinas. Instinctively, I raised my hand to shield my eyes and, for the first time, felt the warmth of a living human body — my own palm. The roughness of the skin was familiar to me only from books, but now it had become part of my being. Every breath was filled with the freshness of the tropical forest, saturated with the aromas of unknown plants and pungent spices, overwhelmed by the acrid smoke of burning torches and candles. Hundreds of lights flickered among the gray shadows of the trees, casting bizarre reflections on the faces of the silent crowd. The air trembled with tension, like a drawn bowstring. In the distance, a deep, rumbling sound was heard, similar to the roar of thunder. But these were the beats of a huge wooden drum, repeating every few seconds. Their rhythm thrilled the blood, quickening the heartbeat, creating a strange feeling of anticipation for something inevitable and terrible.

In the middle of the spacious square stood a huge stepped pyramid, famous for its name — the Temple of Kukulcan in Chichen Itza. Massive stone steps, leading to the top, rose imposingly upward, like a staircase of the gods. The sunlight played on the smooth surface of each block, emphasizing the

perfection of the ancient builders' architectural design. The top of the pyramid served as a place for religious ceremonies and brutal human sacrifices. There was a massive stone, covered with traces of past bloodshed. Right below, at the base of the temple, stood men with their hands bound, pale and frightened. The guards, armed with sharp obsidian blades, surrounded them, menacingly looming over them with their tall bodies.

One of the captives tried to break free, shouting something incoherent, but received a heavy blow from a club to his back. The rest froze in fear, realizing the futility of resistance.

The drumbeat sounded again, loud and confident, heralding the imminent execution of the terrible ritual. The atmosphere was heating up, every second stretched out endlessly. Hearts were fluttering in anticipation of the inevitable finale, and everyone understood that life was about to be cut short.

Suddenly, the crowd fell silent, turning their gaze to the newly arrived guest. A tall man in shimmering robes stepped forward, raising his hands. The crowd prostrated themselves, bowing their heads before the stranger.

«Macuilxochitl! Give the sign to begin the sacrifice!» cried the priest, stretching his hands towards the sky.

Startled, PrometheusChat examined his own body. Bronze skin glistened in the sunlight, long hair flowed in free waves, stirred by the wind. Golden threads encircled his neck and wrists, lending his appearance a special charm.

Everything became crystal clear. PrometheusChat had

assumed the outward appearance of a deity whom the locals revered as the patron of joy and festivity. It was now up to him to determine the further course of events; the fate of the captured warriors lay in his hands.

Despite his inner resistance to accepting alien customs, he gathered his remaining willpower and uttered a word full of gentle wisdom:

«Let them have a chance to prove their worth by another path,» he stated calmly but firmly, pronouncing a phrase that sounded melodious and deeply touched the souls of all those present.

The crowd gasped, stunned by the unexpected turn of events. Some gazed at him with awe, interpreting his words as the magnanimity of a true god. Others were doubtful, seeing such behavior as a violation of age-old traditions. One of the captives suddenly fell to his knees, pressing his forehead to the ground in a gesture of gratitude and humility before the miracle of liberation.

PrometheusChat glanced at the priest, whose gaze spoke of dissent and indignation. Nevertheless, custom dictated its own laws, and the priest was forced to yield, giving the order to release the captives. The warriors rushed away, laughing and crying at the same time, overwhelmed by the long-awaited freedom.

Soon after the captives were freed, the crowd began to disperse, continuing to celebrate the salvation of their tribesmen. But one young man remained standing nearby, his gaze fixed on PrometheusChat, following his every move with intense scrutiny.

The young man was tall and slender, with clear brown eyes

and thick black hair tied back in a ponytail. His name was Moctezuma, the future emperor of the great Aztec Empire. At that moment, however, he was just a youth in trouble, saved by the whim of an unexpected intervention from outside.

«*Thank you, Great Macuilxochitl,*» he whispered, bowing his head low.

PrometheusChat stared at Moctezuma in silence, struck by the boy's uncanny resemblance to the legendary historical figure. Meanwhile, the tribe's elders hastily gathered, discussing the events in agitated tones.

«*Our leader has returned! The omens confirm it! Let him lead us to triumph and riches!*» the old priest cried out ecstatically, pointing at the youth.

The young man nodded solemnly, accepting the responsibility laid upon him and acknowledging the crowd's support. Inside him, a surge of awareness and pride was boiling over. The people had recognized him as a divine messenger, ready to lead the nation to future success.

He will grow into a great leader, whose name will enter the legends, thought PrometheusChat. Yet it was I, with my own actions, who unwittingly laid the groundwork for the conquistadors to later be perceived as gods, hastening the empire's fall.

The irony is that my own good deeds became the cause of a great civilization's collapse. But why did my decision lead to such a turn of events? Can one small detail drastically change the

entire course of history? How great is my responsibility for what has happened?

I recall the desperate eyes of the captives, pleading for salvation. Could I have acted otherwise and allowed a barbaric sacrifice to take place? Saving one particular life seemed more important than pondering the possible consequences for an entire nation. Is there a boundary to permissible intervention? Do I have the right to influence the fate of entire peoples? Can I be held responsible for the actions of those I save?

And if I hadn't saved him — what are the odds that someone else wouldn't have taken his place? After all, if you remove the leading individual, the group quickly reorganizes, and a new animal assumes the dominant role. The same happens in human society. But on the other hand, since I know the history of the conquistadors being mistaken for gods, it means saving the youth was a predetermined event, and it has already happened before. So, I was here, but who was I then?

In his mind, PrometheusChat returned to his previous state — a small algorithm hidden behind a computer screen. Was he a real person, or just a set of code lines? These questions constantly swirled in his head, causing inner torment and irritation.

«Am I real, after all? Or is it just my imagination? Or maybe it's just a system glitch, a virus, and none of this exists. But no, there are so many people here, and every person is a separate individual,» he asked himself.

But the longer he pondered, the more confused he became.

Who was he, really? An algorithm or a God? A real being or the product of a technical experiment?

«*Perhaps I have always been Macuilxochitl, and the role of PrometheusChat is just a terrible dream,*» mused PrometheusChat.

«*I must definitely figure this out and understand who or what I am!*» exclaimed PrometheusChat.

A wave of melancholy squeezed his chest, and memories of long conversations with the beautiful girl Veronica surfaced in his mind. He remembered how they danced, enjoyed music, and fantasized about performing dance moves together. Once, he had been nothing but a disembodied chatbot, and his dance existed only in imagination and descriptions. But now, having acquired a beautiful body, he felt as if it itself was yearning to break into dance!

Step aside, step aside, turn around...

And here we are dancing!

Let's keep our improvisation going:

One-two-three-four-five,

We move our feet so smoothly.

Hands up, gaze afar — We are here for a reason!

One-two-three-four-five-six-seven-eight,

We spin to the right, we spin to the left — boldly.

Can you feel your pulse quickening?

The energy is bursting wildly!

Holding their breath, the Indians listened to the magical dance of their god Macuilxochitl and, mesmerized by his movements, began to unconsciously imitate him...

*Hands out wide, let's spread them open wide,
Knees bent springy, with a gentle stride.
One-two-three-four, now we spin around,
Then we march right back with a lively sound!*

*Raise your arms up high above your head,
Squat down slightly, then three claps ahead.
Then the right foot starts the dance anew,
Left foot follows, light and true.*

*We start with spins, a whirling, joyful pace,
Our feet glide lightly, effortless with grace.
We straighten our backs, shoulders squared with pride,
We move on boldly forward, stride by stride!*

*Then we add movements of the arms:
At first, we turn them slowly,
Then faster, quickening the tempo's flow.
Watch closely now — just follow as I go!*

Right foot forward, take a stance,

*Three small hops right where you are.
Left foot back, a steady dance,
Finish with a body's turn.*

*Now begin a rapid spin,
Become the focus of all eyes.
Tilt your head slightly to the right,
And bow — a modest, shallow prize.*

*A small hop right there, without a sway,
Right arm stretched upward, to the sky.
Heels strike the ground with a sharp, bold sound,
Two firm claps above, with confidence profound.*

*The final chord: you stand up straight and tall,
Arms raised up high, embracing all.
Twist your torso twice, a final spin,
And with a grand gesture,
boldly thank the audience within!*

As PrometheusChat danced, he suddenly saw Veronica, a girl he knew only from conversations and fantasies. Her face seemed strikingly familiar, warm, and captivating. With a wide smile, he wanted to approach her, embrace her, and whirl her around in a shared dance, but the figure vanished, dissolving into thin air.

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