

//////////////////////////////////// PART 1 //////////////////////////////////////

ACT 1, Andante (Part 1):

I was born in Cuba in 1992, a time that marked the so-called Período Especial (Special Period), a consequence of the overthrow of the socialist bloc in 1989. This event resulted in the cutoff of the main supply pipeline to the island, previously facilitated through agreements with the socialist countries, known in Cuba as the Campo Socialista (Socialist Field). It led to one of the worst economic crises in the country, affecting all economic and social spheres. Public health was not exempt from this crisis, and I emphasize this because, at the time of my birth, serious problems arose that were somehow associated with the scarcity of resources in my country.

I got stuck in the birth canal as my mother had a flat pelvis. It was necessary to perform a radiograph to assess the circumference ratio of my head and the birth canal, but unfortunately, there were no materials available to conduct the examination. The doctors decided that the fetus was not too large and relied solely on their experience as gynecologists. In the end, they assisted my entry into the world using forceps, an instrument that caused a cortical injury to my brain and wreaked havoc on my mother. Additionally, due to a lack of threads for sutures, they stitched her up with a rotten thread. Her wound opened, leading to a severe infection that separated us in the early moments of life. She was hospitalized, unable to breastfeed me, and in critical condition. Fortunately, she managed to recover. I say "fortunately" because there were also insufficient medications available for her healing, so she survived and endured in part due to her strong force of will.

ACT 2, Vivace (Part 1):

‡ The child was born in a cursed timestamp at the land †he called *home*. It plunged ~~my~~ its claws into this world, *cursed*. I? emerged into a Cuba enveloped in the throes of the "Special Period", a.k.a. *dejamos de chuparle la teta a la vaca* a.k.a. 🎵 *The Socialist Field is falling down, falling down, falling down* 🎵 a.k.a. things in Cuba went sideways, *Final Destination* sideways ways. Consequences rippled throughout the island, severing lifeline support systems forged from socialist agreements, and plunging Cuba into one of its darkest economic crises. Scarcity of resources cast a shadow over public health, cast a shadow lingering over my birth. My entry into the world was a dance with uncertainty. They played guess and Force'ps my way into the world, *cursing me*. They stitched my mother with a *cursed* thread, hospitalizing her; her survival mirrored the resilience of a nation grappling with dearth. They *cursed* her ~~with me~~.

ACT 3, Prestissimo (Part 1):

You can't break what's already broken. You can't repair what was never whole to begin with. I was ~~shattered~~ from the very start, *cursed*. I shouldn't be here. *I am not here*. Find me in the ~~missing~~ pieces.

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ACT 1, Andante (Part 2):

From a very early age, I was someone very different. My abilities to learn amazed those around me, but I had a level of hyperactivity that was severely unusual. My mother faced many challenges in my early school years and also during those I attended kindergarten, because the other children rejected me, and they didn't want to sit beside me or be near me. I couldn't stay still for a moment, and in addition, I displayed traits of effeminacy, something ill-seen due to machismo in Cuban society.

Cortical injuries in the occipital cortex, specifically in the peri-occipital area, hinder the coordination of movements, leading to significant frustration for children when engaging in sports. I recall that in the second grade of primary school, we were taken to a park, and the teacher leading the children mocked the way I caught a ball and my effeminate behaviour. This rippled in the entire class taking turns to jab mockery at me. Perhaps due to the low impulse control caused by these types of injuries, I grabbed a branch from a tree and started hitting my classmates. Even the teacher fell victim to my aggression. I eventually retreated/climbed to one of the highest trees in the park, and stayed there for hours, until I calmed down.

ACT 2, Vivace (Part 2):

I was out of control. Higher, Further, Faster. *More*. I was burning, an ocean of flames consuming anything and everything around me. I couldn't sleep (*I didn't want to*), I couldn't eat (*I didn't want to*), I wouldn't stop. A supernova of energy wanting to learn as fast as it could, and as much as it would. A supernova of unicorns, dragons, wizards and *I am a Barbie girl*-style of rainbows, ebbing and flowing from my tiny body. A supernova pushing everything away from it, burning alone.

I always hated sports. Vividly (except for gymnastics and athleticism. Those are cool. And tennis). And sports as sure hated me. But more importantly, *I hated* baseball, Cuba's national sport. The idea of throwing a ball around and hitting it with a bat for hours seemed as mundane to me as a caveman religiously revering the fire. I. Was. The. *FIRE*. And I kept burning; anything, everything. The "unholy" kind of fire. So, they put me down, over, and over, and oveeer. *Least be thy lesson one of watery proportions, oh beastly fire*. And so, I drenched. Find me in the ashes.

ACT 3, Prestissimo (Part 2):

And so Prometheus gave humans the gift of fire only to be chained to a mountain, gutted down by the ravens. And so Icharus fell down from the sky, in a burning glimmer of fire. *And so*.

ACT 1, Andante (Part 3):

After this event, they gathered my parents and sent us to a center that identifies these anomalies in behaviour and decides whether a child can continue receiving education in a regular school or should attend a special school. It was very traumatic for my parents and, of course, generated significant anxiety for me, as I didn't quite understand what was happening. These "special schools" are reserved for children with aggressive behaviour due to problematic familiar backgrounds or mental conditions, and they had a nefarious reputation in my country, especially regarding the treatment of less masculine/feminine school boys/girls.

Ultimately, and after multiple tests, the relevant authorities deemed that I had an intelligence quotient (IQ) much higher than the average in Cuba. I had demonstrated special abilities in drawing, writing, and a logic test that specialists administered, which according to them, showed an overwhelming crushing logic aptitude. They suggested to the teacher who was instructing me that I should receive special treatment and additional time, but not a relocation to a special school. I was seated at the front of the classroom, alone, without any children beside me, and bombarded with exercises that were different and more advanced than those given to the rest of the class. Simply put, I *still* didn't fit in with others.

ACT 2, Vivace (Part 3):

I could hear the bells, harrowing. *Straight to the heart, hear the thunder roar.* 'Twas my reckoning. Plug in, plug out. They fed the cables on me, tested me, pried on me; *tender, gently*, minces the meat and plaster the machine. The **beeps** and **bops**, the fucking experiment "subject" being lab tested like a caged rat. HERE COMES THE ENCORE!!! Please Mrs.onster, take your place on the podium. On with the lights, cue to the music. *The show must go on!* Off the meat hook, onto the outdoor mannequin stand, *please*, smile for the fucking camera. *Now dear*, put on a good show.

You earned it.

ACT 3, Prestissimo (Part 3):

🎵 *Welcome to my kingdom madness*
You're just in time for the show 🎵

Once upon a time, there was a (...???) Oh lord! I must have forgotten what it was. I think it starts with F, *mmh*, fag... oh!, *Frankenstein*. But they lived never happily ever after.
The end?

ACT 1, Andante (Part 4):

I always had very particular interests. I read incessantly, delving into books that were quite complex for my age, and even explored dictionaries at the age of 6, which contributed to my knowledge but set me apart from the norm in Cuba. I was seen as an oddity. I developed a very histrionically and theatrical way of talking, using words that seemed flushed out right out of the dictionary. That made me, *me*. But everyone around *me* didn't take it well. "Speak like a normal person". "You sound like a cartoon". I even experienced discrimination within my own family, particularly from my only male cousin (son of my mother's brother). He would mimic my effeminate body language and call me derogatory names when adults were not around. He labelled me as strange or a nerd because, while he made an effort to excel in sports, my enthusiasm was solely directed toward knowledge-related activities. It also does not help that in my natal hometown in the countryside, the machismo, misogyny and homophobia were more deeply rooted. I secluded myself so hard in books, that in fact, once the teachers called my mother because I didn't go ever outside during breaks; instead, I seized the opportunity to read while the other children played or engaged in activities that seemed abnormal to me: pushing each other violently, engaging in impromptu boxing matches, or playing any sport, which I wasn't good at due to a lack of any sorts of physical coordination skills.

My parents, without any formal knowledge or perhaps intuitively, began doing "group manipulation," maybe to help me be better accepted by the other children in elementary school. They organized workshops and proposed them to the teachers, even teaching some themselves. The workshops covered Literature, Reading, and Story Time, the latter being led by my mother, who worked in Cuban publishing fields and was closely connected to children's literature. Another approach to connecting with the groups at my school was celebrating my birthday in the classroom. This helped ease the tension between me and the other kids, but I was self-aware to a degree, so I sometimes felt too much "under the spotlight". Nevertheless, they made my 3rd and 4th years of school education more bearable.

ACT 2, Vivace (Part 4):

The princess chose by her own decree the highest tower from the palace as her resting place. *High up, all alone, in the sky*. She looked down at anything and everything below, small dots like dripped ink from the scrolls that surrounded her. Tired from the peasants, the princes, the court, the etiquette, the palace; she was so, so tired. All she could do was wait one day; things would start moving for her. You see, dear. *She was cursed since her birth*. No matter what she said or did, no matter how hard she tried, things for her always twisted. She could not be understood by others, she could not help others, and she did not fit in with others. Any attempt of her at doing anything would mysteriously turn backwards.

The king and queen, frustrated, arranged the finest of banquettes for her, the most magnificent of jousts and tournaments, and hired the best translators in the kingdom for her. She smiled, graciously, adjusted her dress and kept on with the demeanour and strength her porcelain masquerade of a face would allow her. After the bells rang at night, she would run to her tower. And she would dream, and she would sing, and she would dance. All by herself.

At night, before she went to bed, the king and queen would tell her a bedtime story. She relished those stories more than anything in the world. You see, *they never had an ending*. Each story was a fragment of a passage that would link to another, endlessly. So, she took refuge in those stories, she took solace in the idea that for every passing day, she would continue to sink in them, to be marvelled at them. So, she kept dreaming and she kept living, at the top of her lonely tower.

ACT 3, Prestissimo (Part 4):

I was trapped. Chained. By me, from me, *to me*, for me, the chains were indissolubly twisted in an amalgam of metal and flesh. The loops of dreams cycled my pupil like blinding lights on the highway. FF.FF.FF.FF.FF.FF.FF.FF.FF.FF.FF. *Just fast forward*. I want to move, I want to breathe, I want to *wake up*.

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ACT 1, Andante (Part 5):

In Cuba, it was impossible to conceive of a video game market during my childhood—such a market simply did not exist and still to a degree doesn't, although this might surprise some. It's only been in recent years, through the illegal or informal market (commonly referred to as the black market), that consoles from abroad have started to be sold through social media. This market, which remains largely the same in 2023, also includes pirated games and other similar items. You can imagine, then, what it was like during my childhood years, having access to console videogames.

In the nineties, to play with a video game console, you had to rent it from the few privileged individuals who owned them. There were two modalities: you could take it home for as many hours as you could afford, along with the games available and that you could pay for, or you could pay per hour. The second option involved p(l)aying at houses (operating illegally) that functioned as video game rooms. Generally, there was only one console, and you had to wait in line for your turn patiently. My parents first rented a console for 24 hours because a neighbour had done so; I had seen this marvel in their house and was fascinated; I touched a controller for the first time, played a game for the first time. It was Super Mario World 3, and my mother recalls that all my restlessness, lack of concentration, and disinterest in things, processes tied to my hyperactivity, had disappeared.

My parents consulted with specialists, especially regarding the issue of lack of concentration, and they were advised to allow me to engage in this form of entertainment moderately, for less than an hour a day (*something I, clearly, would take further!*). That's how I entered the fascinating world of games—the only universe to which I fully surrendered and managed to escape my discomforts, frustrations, taunts, and the feeling of not fitting into any group. It was another world for me.

ACT 2, Vivace (Part 5):

The ~~alien~~ angels came over to me, as in a revelation. They whispered over my ears, blinded me with their pixelated light. I felt like floating, reaching the sky. They came to our universe through the *Mother Console* and slowly began to invade the world with their divinity and technology, each iteration a new evolution of their marvellous feats. Around the time of the arrival of the great mothership, the *Paw Station Once*, I began to ponder about joining them.

I decided to start the launch of *Project Ascension*. My being, myself would be devoured by ~~games~~ the angels, my skin crawling with pixels, quests, menus, stories. An information overload that numbed me from the pain of my existence. *Re-booting. open_eyes+scan-surroundings.exe*. The universe around me reflected itself in bits, pixels, and frames. Divinity was within me, the angels singing at my ascension. In front of me, a throne that would mark my departure from the earthen realm. **select_option.exe -Sit on the throne_-Also sit on the throne.** (my being felt a surge of cables and metal being pushed onto my body, connecting to it, *an oddly familiar sensation*) (a beam of light pulls me upwards, as the mother ship acknowledges my presence, pulling me towards her womb) ~~this is it... no turning back now~~ (light floods... my_eyes.eye) (...) (...) (I...)

ACT 1, Andante (Part 6):

I moved schools around 5th grade. This was due to the current school I had only offered education for the first 4 years of school. This transition cost me the teacher that I grew so accustomed to, and who paid a particular effort to help me due to my “condition” (Aleida). It also cost me the company of students who I was able to (painfully and slowly) befriend, and who somehow began to accept me. This was one of the many transitions between schools I had. I remember feeling also as a kid with a perpetual status quo of “the new kid in town”. I spent there the 5th and 6th years of education. It was among the worst years of discrimination abuse I faced. I erased most of my memories of that time. I remember once, in an art class, I accidentally spelt the water I was using for painting on the “rich kid” from the classroom. After, four male kids cornered me after class and gangbang punched me in the stomach, holding me for the affected party to enact his “revenge”. One of many incidents. I would constantly get into fights. Most professors would not pay any attention to me, willingly ignoring me. I felt utterly alone, different, marked or stained. Like a monster. I was genuinely happy when I transferred to secondary school. My parents tell me another very difficult anecdote that I didn’t remember (or wanted to remember), and it’s that in the first years of secondary school, a child attacked me and broke my nasal septum, just because he started telling me that I was weird and that I was always alone while making fun of me, and I lashed back at him. There are many difficult things that I think my emotional memory has erased or crushed, memories I deemed unnecessary and burdensome. After that incident, they transferred me to another school, and I believe that at least in that other place, I found two or three kids who were misfits like me, and I formed at least a small social group. There were two girls discriminated against because of their weight and a boy who shared my passion for video games. They are still amongst those I consider the best of friends.

ACT 2, Vivace (Part 6):

The traveller, *the spy*, the saviour, went from town to town, from mission to mission. Never turning back. His identity indissolubly tied to his journey, his identity dissolving in his journey. *Who I am? Where am I?* Was he ever amnesic (such a cliché!) to begin with? The years flashed in front of his eyes in a sandstorm of wrecked memories. *But he had to keep going.* No matter what, no matter the failures, he had a path, he had a purpose, and he had to keep walking. He was a terrible spy, to begin with. So, he knew that it wasn’t gonna be easy. *But he had to keep going.* Slowly, his body began to merge. He had usurped so many identities, that his flesh began to deform into aberration. Wings, claws, tentacles, *a snake sizzling in the shadows.* Was the spy even human to begin with? Every failure stripped more and more of his humanity. *-Oh, poor spy? Are you doomed to fail, or are you failing to doom yourself? You just have to fit in, silly!* Alas, there’s no way an aberration like you can accomplish anything. Now, dear, begone with you. Off to the shadows!- *But, I have to keep going.*

ACT 3, Prestissimo (Part 6):

I will fester with their flesh, and I will drink their blood. 🎵 *When the moon is high, I'll be hunting for you, And when the night is done, You'll be screaming for More, more, more. I am not what you want, But I got what you need.* 🎵 **IF THEY WANT A MONSTER, THEN THEY'LL HAVE ONE.** Part of me grew tired of trying to mingle; part of me grew dark, becoming the monster they craved. F***** proud! METAAAAAAAAL (maniacally laughs in *Nimona*).

ACT 1, Andante (Part 7):

In high school, I also faced attacks because of my “conditions”. I was in a boarding system since there was no other way in Cuba to pursue that level of education, and it was very challenging. I obtained a scholarship for a vocational school (due to my academic performance), one of the most prestigious in the country. However, the stay was from Monday to Friday, and only on weekends could I go to my parents' house. One of the so-called "friends" in my group, perhaps to assert his masculinity and align with the peer group, began mocking me and joining in the acts of discrimination that others were engaging in. It was very complicated because we were neighbours, his parents were friends with ours, and we had gone through the previous stage of education in a different manner.

I can recount from that period that many times I didn't even go to the dining hall because I felt better enduring hunger than being the target of mockery in the long lines to enter. I tried to shower and change my clothes when nobody was around. Despite having an excellent physique, I feared any action that could lead to a fight, an act of ridicule, or discrimination. Schools with that boarding regime in Cuba have been notorious for acts of violence and situations disrupting order. I even feared for my life because, in a similar school around that time, they murdered a boy with machetes for being openly gay. This was one of the many violent and horrific episodes I was aware of.

During my university years, I had my first romantic relationship. Despite being in a design school and at a level where homophobia supposedly didn't exist, I even had an unpleasant incident with a professor. She insinuated to my mother in a school meeting regarding one project I failed (the only one I did fail during all my school years) that she saw me as being too close to my partner (we were not even openly a couple), with a tone and intention that were clearly homophobic. My mother told her that my personal life was "personal," as the word itself implies, and this was enough for my grades in that subject to drop further and face derogatory treatment from her in classes.

On the other hand, my partner's mother was quite difficult—overprotective and homophobic. In Cuba, as in many Latin American countries and as I mentioned before, a predominant macho culture exists. Despite the claim of being more open and tolerant, racism, machismo, and homophobia are deeply rooted cultural traits. If this was happening to me in the "most civilized" part of the country, which is its capital, one can only imagine what it's like in rural areas. My partner's mother used to call my house constantly. She went as far as interrogating my mother to find out if her son was going alone or not to my house; her insinuations were very difficult to tolerate. I think my mother, out of respect for my partner's privacy, didn't confront her, but it was a very complicated situation for her as she and my parent were always supportive of my sexuality and my gender expression.

I also faced ridicule for my condition in my paternal family. As a kid, my grandmother could not stand the way I talked and would always lash back when I used “weird” words. I overheard as an adult a conversation with a friend of hers, shortly before she would immigrate out of the country, where she would call me “retarded” with “problems since birth” and would frame my best friend as my love partner. Shortly after, while I was still in college my grandfather, growing older and alone, a few times imitated effeminate language to mock me, which troubled me deeply, as at that time I was his only relative in the country that took care of him. Even after being an adult, there was always that lingering feeling of being “disjointed”, and there was always someone, near or far, to somehow make me remember it. Living in a place where just being different condemns you leads to isolation, self-doubt, and constant blows back and forth to one’s *self*. I inhabited, after all, more than one prison.

ACT 2, Vivace (Part 7):

This is it. End of the line. Whatever lies ahead, it's on you. 🎵 *A sacrifice / A reason for your endless pain / You're crucified / And nothing really matters* 🎵

One way or another, out of control. Out of the chains, out of the system, out of the shithole. No more curses, tear the sky asunder, bring down the tower. You were always fucking broken to begin with. Consume everything in your flames, 🎵 *I see the truth in your eyes / through the lies / Don't you hide it behind a disguise and a fake smile / You're mesmerized by the sights and the lights / In the darkest of nights, despite your own destruction.* 🎵

Embrace this world's embryo, the eternal eye of surveillance a.k.a *God*. Don't hide from it. Feast on it. Better than your fear. 🎵 *When years go by, you're standing in your castle high / All those dreams, feeling so surreal* 🎵

Keep walking, keep going. The sand will tear you over and over, the sirens will sing a beautiful song of allure over the starry sky, and you will keep losing your humanity along the way. *Don't stop now.*

🎵 *Reach for the stars with the heart that you've torn apart*

Patch it up and arise

You're the Goddess of the Light

Blazing high, satisfied, riding through the skies

This is your Armageddon 🎵

ACT 3, Prestissimo (Part 7):

You don't need a reason to help people (*Zidane Tribal, Final Fantasy IX*). All I ever did was pay attention to myself. And I'm not even sure I saw myself clearly. You can't go forward if you keep looking back (*Luke fon Fabre, Tales of the Abyss*). Thou Art I... And I Am Thou (*Persona 4*).

This is my reckoning. And I can only keep walking, forwards. Set sails. 🎵 *When the tears are in your eyes / You sing a drunken lullaby / And the weight of the world / Comes crashing on your spine / Now remember what's inside / The warmth that made you smile / And rise up high / Towards the golden sky*

Your Eden 🎵

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