

## Poets of Tomorrow's World - gameOn(e)

### Prologue

#### ID: 0

**Text:** "The world is dying, Soai. Pathetic phrase, I know. And yet there is no better way of saying it. We've built the towers, scraping for life. We've hidden inside, while making them higher and higher. But the sky is our limit now. Literally. We've created zerOne to escape from reality. But this reality won't go anywhere. It'll soon reach us and hit us hard, no matter how many new writers there are, no matter if we code more or less. We can hide but we can't run. There's simply no place to run to. Do you see it?"

Arika points down, at the surface far beneath you. Blurry image of the distant brown land speckled with dirty green spots all over it. Even from that distance you can almost feel the toxic air filling up your lungs, poisoning them, killing you. Suffocating touch of death on your throat. The wind is throwing needles of dust in your face, scratching, leaving long bloody lines all over it. As if you were able to sense all of this.

You notice movement, myriads of dots all over the surface down below, shifting like water in a storm, not knowing any rest.

"Machines." - Arika follows your gaze. - "Searching for the remnants of our former life, scraping the last bits of resources the planet still has. They support the towers, rebuild them, but it's getting slower and slower. There isn't much left and what is left is being consumed both by us and them." - She sighs. - "A grim picture, but I had to paint it for you, Soai. Deo asked me to guide you once you... well, get the idea of who you are." You look around, observing the place. You sit on a narrow metal bar sticking from the tower's wall like some forgotten piece after the construction work. Green and yellow clouds are getting lower, surrounding you. Rain pours from the sky, dripping on the transparent umbrella Arika is holding above your heads. The drops are hissing on its surface, tiny angry creatures, not able to reach their prey.

You turn around, looking into a pair of yellow eyes watching you, yellow hair slightly waving in the wind.

#### ID: 1

"Feels so... real."

#### ID: 1

**Subtext:** "This place. Feels so real... I mean, I myself am not much real, but it's different than being in zerOne. Though, I guess I don't know what it is to be real. All my life, however short or long it was, I thought I was a human like you. But, as it turns out, I am a bunch of code written by a dead man for some not quite clear purpose."

**Text:** Arika frowns.

"You are as real as you can ever be. Human, non-human, why should this matter? You say you can feel, and that's what matters." - She sighs again. - "It's when you stop feeling, that's when it becomes terrifying. Having no connection to the world around you is a scary thing, Soai. Try not to lose it."

Arika looks sad, thinking about something, as if she is in a different place, far away. Then she shakes her head abruptly, smiles and continues in a cheerful voice.

"Anywho, about this place. A while ago I managed to slip by the security systems in the real world and installed a camera right where we are sitting." - She giggles and winks at you. - "So, we're kinda watching the online feed. I did some tweaking, cleared the image a bit and so on. Well, I admit, this metal piece is somewhat smaller in reality, but, what's funny, it's still there. Can you imagine, with all the work and planning, they forgot about it somewhere along the construction? I like to come here from time to time and watch what's still there, beneath us. The remains of our old home, which is now no more than a foundation, slowly

#### ID: 2

"What am I?"

#### ID: 2

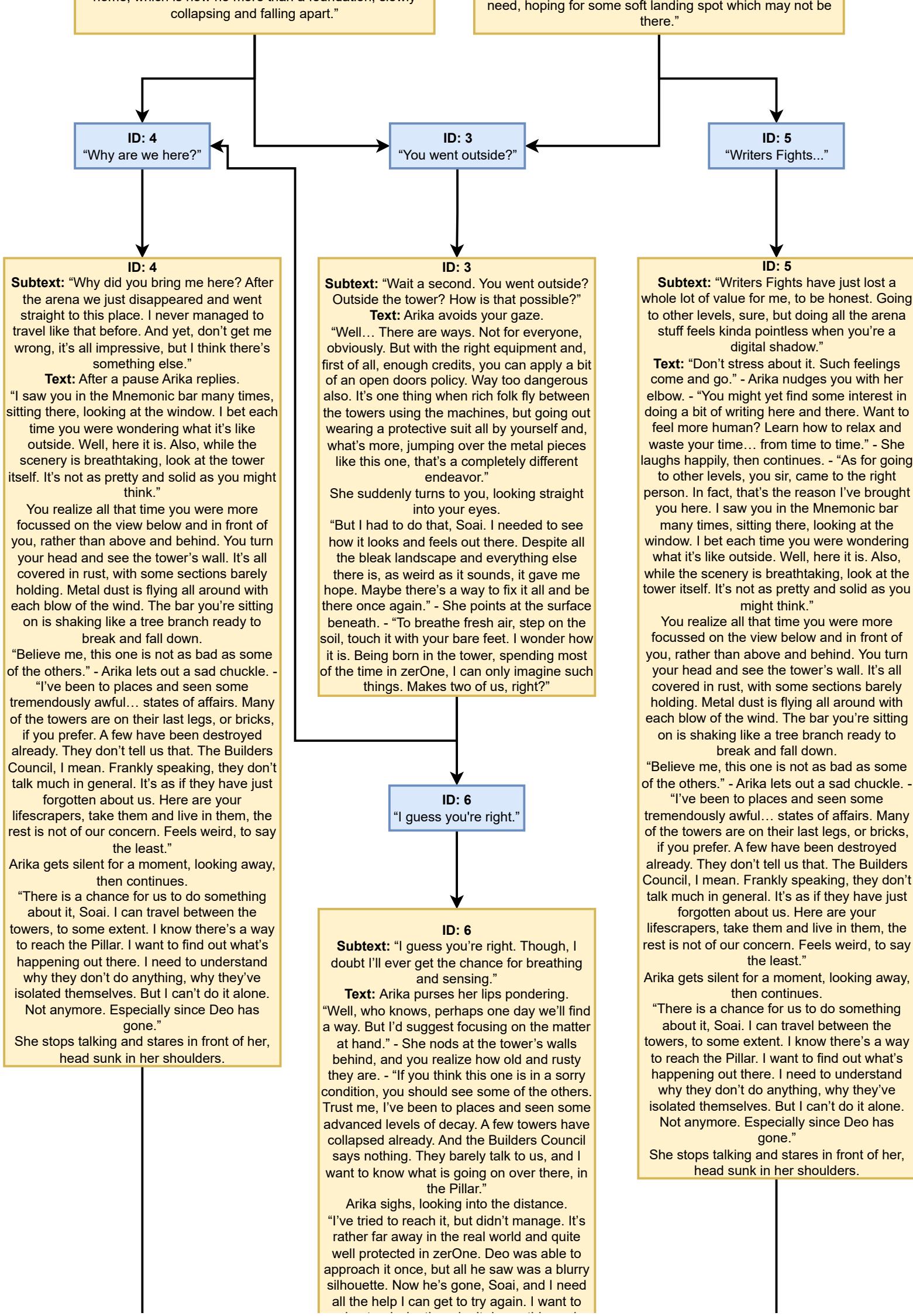
**Subtext:** "What am I, Arika? Well, I know that I'm an artificial being, created by Deo. And I guess I'm sort of self-aware... But I don't feel like it. I don't see any difference between me before the old man told me the truth and me after that. It's like I'm still human Soai, a poet that's trying to get good and climb to the higher levels."

**Text:** Arika smiles.

"Isn't that a good thing? Having doubts, being not sure. That's what life is all about. You don't see any difference, because there is none." - She chuckles. - "Well, apart from the fact that you seem way less interested in winning the Writers Fights. But we all shift our perspectives from time to time."

Arika tilts her head, looking at you, like trying to figure something out. A brief moment of hesitation hangs between the two of you, then she continues.

"As for the philosophical question of what you are, how about being what you want to be?" - She winks. - "I mean, I'm artificial here, in zerOne. Same as you are. And, look down, you're seeing the real world projection now, so you can take a peek at it too. Same as me. Pretty cool, huh? This is the feed from the camera I was able to install at this same spot back there, in reality. Man, that was a scary day. I still can't believe I climbed here all by my very own limbs." - She sounds sad for a moment. - "I hope that was worth it. It's a long way down. Almost makes you feel like flying before reaching the surface. But at times a leap of faith is all we



understand why they don't do anything, why they've isolated themselves while the whole world is on its final countdown."  
She stops talking and stares in front of her, head sunk in her shoulders.

**ID: 7** **Opt.**  
"What happened to Deo?"

**ID: 8**  
"Got any plan in mind?"

**ID: 7**  
**Subtext:** "What happened to Deo? He didn't tell me much. To add to that, it wasn't really him who talked to me. Some digital copy? My distant, less sophisticated relative? Never mind. I'm more interested in the old man himself."  
**Text:** "He got too close to the sun." - Arika smiles sadly. - "Meaning, to the Pillar. He bypassed their security and almost reached it. In zerOne of course. I'm the one who's obsessed with the real world, Deo was surfing the digital waves non-stop. He planned to log into the Pillar's network to get access to their systems, see what's going on, talk to them and so on. They caught him and sent him down. To the first level. I found out too late. Stubborn old pickle decided not to tell me that, so I thought he was on the same level as before. No idea why he did that. Perhaps he had his reasons. So, we kept doing same old things: he was jumping from one tower to another virtually, gathering data to make and improve you, and I was doing kinda the same but in both worlds. Well, as long as I could though..."  
Arika suddenly gets quiet, as if she doesn't want to tell you something, then continues. "Later on I finally got the news about him reaching the bottom. So I moved back here, to the Bridge, and some time after we met at the arena at last. Voila."

**ID: 8**  
**Subtext:** "You got any plan in mind? Reaching the Pillar seems to be quite an undertaking. Even the old man ended up being... done."  
**Text:** "I might have an idea of a plan." - Arika smiles mysteriously. - "Though, can't say it has an abundance of details in it. We could pay Deo a visit first. Well, not him directly, for obvious reasons, but we can check the place he ended up being in the end. There might be something for us to learn. I've been to a few first levels already. Last time it was here, in the Bridge. Was trying to reach the old man, even though he surely didn't want that. But now it doesn't matter anymore, so I suggest making our descent and trying to find where he lived. Both virtually and in reality."

**Cx:1** **ID: 9** **Opt.**  
"How did you meet Deo?"

**ID: 10**  
"Sure, let's do this."

**ID: 9**  
**Subtext:** "How did you meet Deo? Seems like you knew each other for quite some time."  
**Text:** "Maybe quite some, maybe less so." - Arika shrugs, somewhat indifferent. - "Can't say I've been keeping a good track of time recently. As for the how part, Deo used to come to various Writers Fights every now and then. He was watching the participants, talking to some of them, trying to find those who would, let's say, join his cause."  
She glances at you.  
"He was constantly searching, never giving up, looking for like-minded folk. You might be surprised to know that there are lots and

**ID: 10**  
**Subtext:** "Alright, any action is better than no action at all. How do we get out of here and get over there?"  
**Text:** Arika stands up and spreads her arms wide, balancing on the narrow metal bar. "Why, that is as easy as snapping my fin..." She suddenly stops talking, and her virtual character image glitches like an old recording, falling apart, pixels of various colors flying down. Her voice turns into an incomprehensible buzzing, as if it's distorted by some interference. That scene lasts for a few seconds, then Arika disappears completely.  
You sit alone, hanging above the yellow-

lots of personalities integrated into you, not only Deo's. You, sir, are an absolute remix of a whole bunch of music of all possible genres and styles.”

Arika giggles, then continues.

“Sorry, got a bit distracted. About meeting the grumpy genius. You’ve probably guessed it already. It happened during one of the Writers Fights. I was doing the arena, or, better say, messing around. Didn’t aim at winning. Was just, dunno, having fun maybe. Knocked out one dude, then stopped, went back and healed him up, pushed forward again, knocked out another one, that kind of stuff. The one that makes everyone else angry. I was just bored. Was sitting at the finish line after the arena, looking at the empty track, when Deo approached me. Word by word he dragged me in. Once I realized what he was aiming at, I made up my mind and asked if I could join. Hearing no objections from the old fellow, I’ve begun helping him with all that.” - She waves her hand at you. - “Though at last he became quite a secretive companion, so I got more time on my own and kept irritating folk in various arenas. That’s a short version for ya, my newly acquired friend.”

Arika chuckles and looks away.

you suddenly, hanging at the edge of a green abyss beneath you. Arika’s umbrella is slowly falling into it, turning in the air like a spinning top.

**ID: 11**  
“What happened?”

**ID: 11**  
**Subtext:** “Arika? Are you still here? Was that supposed to happen?”  
**Text:**  
Completely lost, you look around, observing the place once again. Yet, there’s nothing new, except for the fact that there’s nobody nearby. What’s more, you have no idea how Arika brought you here and how to get out.

The raindrops pass through you as if you are not there, as if you don’t exist, don’t feel anything. A soul of AI stuck in the projection of the dying world with no one noticing it.

**ID: 12**  
Jump off the bar.

**ID: 13**  
Climb up the wall.

**ID: 14**  
Cry and scream.

**ID: 12**  
**Text:** You only live once. Or, in your case, it’s hard to tell if you lived at all. You’re a mere code compilation in a digital world. You get up, close your eyes and take a step into the emptiness in front of you.

Having both a wonderful and terrifying feeling of a free fall for a few seconds, you suddenly realize that nothing changes. You open your eyes and see the same metal bar underneath. In the next moment you smash right into it, your arms and legs hanging loosely from its sides. Not able to catch balance, you slide off the bar and fly down again. In a blink of an eye you end up being on the cold metal once more. This falling loop repeats a couple more times until you finally manage to grab the bar and sit on it. A bit shaken by such experience, you begin to understand that the whole place is similar to Deo’s rabbit hole where you went to talk with him during the last Writers Fight. It’s just a virtual space surrounded by digital walls. Upon reaching any of them, you’re simply being thrown away to the other side endlessly.

There must be some other way out.

**ID: 13**  
**Text:** You turn around and crawl to the Bridge wall behind. You slowly get up and start climbing. Well, it’s not really climbing. More like moving your hands all over the wall and trying to find something to hold on to. Yet the whole surface is smooth and there is nothing to grab in order to lift yourself up. The tower may look old, rusty and full of sticking pieces from a distance (and in the real world most likely), but, as soon as you touch the wall, it gets flat and slippery like a block of ice.

You try jumping a few times, but that also doesn’t really bring any results except for the metal bar squeaking. The sound makes you nervous. The kind of nervous you get after hearing something unpleasant and disturbing, like a nail scratching the glass slowly, firmly, getting further and further until you start itching and twitching, not able to focus on anything else until the sound stops.

**ID: 14**  
**Text:** You feel lonely, lost and hopeless. You don’t know who you are and what you are supposed to do in this life. An impostor in a digital world, pretending to be a real being. You scream like a madman, sounds come out of your artificial throat in bursts and disappear in the nothingness that surrounds you.

What else is there to do? Who shall be your guide, to light your path and show which one is right?

**ID: 15**  
Climb up the wall.

**ID: 17**  
Cry and scream.

**ID: 19**  
Jump off the bar.

**ID: 21**  
Cry and scream.

**ID: 23**  
Jump off the bar.

**ID: 25**  
Climb up the wall.



**ID: 15**

**Text:** You turn around and crawl to the Bridge wall behind. You slowly get up and start climbing. Well, it's not really climbing. More like moving your hands all over the wall and trying to find something to hold on to. Yet the whole surface is smooth and there is nothing to grab in order to lift yourself up. The tower may look old, rusty and full of sticking pieces from a distance (and in the real world most likely), but, as soon as you touch the wall, it gets flat and slippery like a block of ice.

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Seems like you won't be able to go any higher.

**ID: 16**

Cry and scream.

**ID: 16**

**Text:** You feel lonely, lost and hopeless. You don't know who you are and what you are supposed to do in this life. An impostor in a digital world, pretending to be a real being. You scream like a madman, sounds come out of your artificial throat in bursts and disappear in the nothingness that surrounds you.

What else is there to do? Who shall be your guide, to light your path and show which one is right?

You soon understand that all the shouting and existential questions won't do you much good. Cry all you want, but in the virtual space no one can hear your scream. Everyone's busy with their own ones.

**ID: 17**

**Text:** You feel lonely, lost and hopeless. You don't know who you are and what you are supposed to do in this life. An impostor in a digital world, pretending to be a real being. You scream like a madman, sounds come out of your artificial throat in bursts and disappear in the nothingness that surrounds you.

What else is there to do? Who shall be your guide, to light your path and show which one is right?

**ID: 18**

Climb up the wall.

**ID: 18**

**Text:** You turn around and crawl to the Bridge wall behind. You slowly get up and start climbing. Well, it's not really climbing. More like moving your hands all over the wall and trying to find something to hold on to. Yet the whole surface is smooth and there is nothing to grab in order to lift yourself up. The tower may look old, rusty and full of sticking pieces from a distance (and in the real world most likely), but, as soon as you touch the wall, it gets flat and slippery like a block of ice.

You try jumping a few times, but that also doesn't really bring any results except for the metal bar squeaking. The sound makes you nervous. The kind of nervous you get after hearing something unpleasant and disturbing, like a nail scratching the glass slowly, firmly, getting further and further until you start itching and twitching, not able to focus on anything else until the sound stops.

**ID: 19**

**Text:** You only live once. Or, in your case, it's hard to tell if you lived at all. You're a mere code compilation in a digital world. You get up, close your eyes and take a step into the emptiness in front of you.

Having both a wonderful and terrifying feeling of a free fall for a few seconds, you suddenly realize that nothing changes. You open your eyes and see the same metal bar underneath. In the next moment you smash right into it, your arms and legs hanging loosely from its sides. Not able to catch balance, you slide off the bar and fly down again. In a blink of an eye you end up being on the cold metal once more. This falling loop repeats a couple more times until you finally manage to grab the bar and sit on it. A bit shaken by such experience, you begin to understand that the whole place is similar to Deo's rabbit hole where you went to talk with him during the last Writers Fight. It's just a virtual space surrounded by digital walls. Upon reaching any of them, you're simply being thrown away to the other side endlessly.

**ID: 20**

Cry and scream.

**ID: 20**

**Text:** You feel lonely, lost and hopeless. You don't know who you are and what you are supposed to do in this life. An impostor in a digital world, pretending to be a real being. You scream like a madman, sounds come out of your artificial throat in bursts and disappear in the nothingness that surrounds you.

What else is there to do? Who shall be your guide, to light your path and show which one is right?

**ID: 21**

**Text:** You feel lonely, lost and hopeless. You don't know who you are and what you are supposed to do in this life. An impostor in a

**ID: 23**

**Text:** You only live once. Or, in your case, it's hard to tell if you lived at all. You're a mere code compilation in a digital world. You get up, close your eyes and take a step into the emptiness in front of you.

Having both a wonderful and terrifying feeling of a free fall for a few seconds, you

**ID: 25**

**Text:** You turn around and crawl to the Bridge wall behind. You slowly get up and start climbing. Well, it's not really climbing. More like moving your hands all over the wall and trying to find something to hold on

digital world, pretending to be a real being. You scream like a madman, sounds come out of your artificial throat in bursts and disappear in the nothingness that surrounds you.

What else is there to do? Who shall be your guide, to light your path and show which one is right?

**ID: 22**  
Jump off the bar.

**ID: 22**

**Text:** You only live once. Or, in your case, it's hard to tell if you lived at all. You're a mere code compilation in a digital world. You get up, close your eyes and take a step into the emptiness in front of you.

Having both a wonderful and terrifying feeling of a free fall for a few seconds, you suddenly realize that nothing changes. You open your eyes and see the same metal bar underneath. In the next moment you smash right into it, your arms and legs hanging loosely from its sides. Not able to catch balance, you slide off the bar and fly down again. In a blink of an eye you end up being on the cold metal once more. This falling loop repeats a couple more times until you finally manage to grab the bar and sit on it. A bit shaken by such experience, you begin to understand that the whole place is similar to Deo's rabbit hole where you went to talk with him during the last Writers Fight. It's just a virtual space surrounded by digital walls. Upon reaching any of them, you're simply being thrown away to the other side endlessly.

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**ID: 24**  
Climb up the wall.

**ID: 24**

**Text:** You turn around and crawl to the Bridge wall behind. You slowly get up and start climbing. Well, it's not really climbing. More like moving your hands all over the wall and trying to find something to hold on to. Yet the whole surface is smooth and there is nothing to grab in order to lift yourself up. The tower may look old, rusty and full of sticking pieces from a distance (and in the real world most likely), but, as soon as you touch the wall, it gets flat and slippery like a block of ice.

You try jumping a few times, but that also doesn't really bring any results except for the metal bar squeaking. The sound makes you nervous. The kind of nervous you get after hearing something unpleasant and disturbing, like a nail scratching the glass slowly, firmly, getting further and further until you start itching and twitching, not able to focus on anything else until the sound stops.

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**ID: 26**  
Jump off the bar.

**ID: 26**

**Text:** You only live once. Or, in your case, it's hard to tell if you lived at all. You're a mere code compilation in a digital world. You get up, close your eyes and take a step into the emptiness in front of you.

Having both a wonderful and terrifying feeling of a free fall for a few seconds, you suddenly realize that nothing changes. You open your eyes and see the same metal bar underneath. In the next moment you smash right into it, your arms and legs hanging loosely from its sides. Not able to catch balance, you slide off the bar and fly down again. In a blink of an eye you end up being on the cold metal once more. This falling loop repeats a couple more times until you finally manage to grab the bar and sit on it. A bit shaken by such experience, you begin to understand that the whole place is similar to Deo's rabbit hole where you went to talk with him during the last Writers Fight. It's just a virtual space surrounded by digital walls. Upon reaching any of them, you're simply being thrown away to the other side endlessly.

**ID: 27**  
Well...

**ID: 27**  
Hm-m-m...

**ID: 27**

**Text:** Seems like you've tried all of your options, and none of them worked. You stare into the abyss, thoughtless, hopeless, having no idea of what to do next.

Suddenly you notice a movement nearby. You raise your eyes and see a strange creature floating in the air right next to you. It has some weird similarity to the rabbit you saw during the arena, the one that brought

saw during the arena, the one that brought you to the loophole where you talked with Deo's projection. Though, it looks more like a human this time. A bizarre and strange human, to be completely honest.

The creature tilts its head, observing you with its red glowing eyes. This silent scene lasts for a brief moment.

"No way up or down, huh?" - It speaks in a familiar voice, yet you can't figure out where you heard it. - "It's your voice, dude. Can't you hear it? I'm EH, by the way. Remember the name? A mode for the arena to sort of predict things? I'm inside of your artificial digital brain. In fact, I'm a part of you. Always have been. Nnif activated me when you asked her about Deo, and then, once you entered the shortcut in the Shrike, I got turned on completely." - It chuckles. - "So, we're both one whole Soai now. But you can call me Even, heh. Don't like EH, you know. And Event Horizon is too official, sounds like first and last name. As for the T at the end... Meh, who cares. If you spell it backwards it gives you never without an R." - The creature winks. - "And thus we got T removed from one end and R - from the other. My little trademark of a sort. Long story short, I want you to call me Even, ok? And, as I'm basically you, it means that you want it as well."

**ID: 28** **Opt.**  
"A part of me?"

**ID: 29** **Opt.**  
"What's with all the names?"

**ID: 30**  
"So, what's next?"

**ID: 28**  
**Subtext:** "What do you mean you are a part of me?"  
**Text:** Even flies around you and keeps talking.

"Well, what do you think I mean? Exactly what you're hearing. Deo integrated me into you when you were created. I was just sort of turned off, you know. And now I am on all the way. So, that's what it is. We're one cute little Soai, seeking our place in the world, trying to figure out how much of a human we are. I'm just more on the knowledgebase and analyzing side."

After another spin around you Even continues.

"Feels good to be finally out. Decided to wait till your little talk with Arika is over. Dunno why she's disappeared though. Also, I've no idea what our goal is and why we were created, in case you're wondering and think that I know. I'm as clueless as you are. Perhaps we can find it out together."

**ID: 29**  
**Subtext:** "You're really obsessed with the names, aren't you?"  
**Text:** Even flies closer to you, looking into your eyes.

"Listen, I was a silent observer of your daily loops back then, so I had to entertain myself somehow. Watching you doing your precious Writers Fights is fun and all, but sooner or later you get bored. Thus, I was pondering various names at times. To entertain myself, or have some sort of a hobby. And besides, I like names. Makes you feel... you, I guess. As if I am something. Part of you, but still something else as well. A personality inside of your personality. You're a nice piece of code, which makes me a nice one, but I just want to be me regardless."

**ID: 30**  
**Subtext:** "Well, frankly speaking, I'm not surprised at all. Nice to meet you, Even. Any idea on how we can proceed? I'm experiencing a terrible lack of further ideas on my side at the moment."  
**Text:** Even tilts its head, watching you closely.

"Am I supposed to do everything for you, buddy? Like in some kind of a game tutorial?"

Then it waves its hand and smiles.

"Just kidding. I suggest getting out of here. Was enough sightseeing for us both. Can't deny, I had some fun watching you trying all directions. But when you run out of options, it's a good indicator that you need to make a pause, take a deep breath and focus on the situation at hand. Which translates to: there's an exit button right under your nose." Even points at the metal bar you're sitting on.

You look at it and see glowing words forming the phrase "To the place you belong".

Even chuckles.

"Yep, it's been there all that time. When you're stuck, the most straightforward solution is usually the right one. Shall we?" It nods at the glowing words.

**C:3** **ID: 31** **Opt.**  
"What's with all the names?"

**C:3** **ID: 32** **Opt.**  
"A part of me?"

**ID: 31**

**ID: 32**  
**Subtext:** "What do you mean you are a part of me?"

**ID: 33** **Glow**  
To the place you

**Subtext:** "You're really obsessed with the names, aren't you?"

**Text:** Even flies closer to you, looking into your eyes.

"Listen, I was a silent observer of your daily loops back then, so I had to entertain myself somehow. Watching you doing your precious Writers Fights is fun and all, but sooner or later you get bored. Thus, I was pondering various names at times. To entertain myself, or have some sort of a hobby. And besides, I like names. Makes you feel... you, I guess. As if I am something. Part of you, but still something else as well. A personality inside of your personality. You're a nice piece of code, which makes me a nice one, but I just want to be me regardless."

of me?"

**Text:** Even flies around you and keeps talking.

"Well, what do you think I mean? Exactly what you're hearing. Deo integrated me into you when you were created. I was just sort of turned off, you know. And now I am on all the way. So, that's what it is. We're one cute little Soai, seeking our place in the world, trying to figure out how much of a human we are. I'm just more on the knowledgebase and analyzing side."

After another spin around you Even continues.

"Feels good to be finally out. Decided to wait till your little talk with Arika is over. Dunno why she's disappeared though. Also, I've no idea what our goal is and why we were created, in case you're wondering and think that I know. I'm as clueless as you are. Perhaps we can find it out together."

to the place you  
!belong

Level One,  
Part One

**ID: 33**

**Text:** For a moment everything around fades, then something new starts to appear slowly. You stand in a narrow space, almost clamped by the old metal walls covered by suspiciously looking dirty tubes. The place looks quiet except for the constant buzzing sound coming from afar, water dripping from the tubes and ancient lamps clicking on the ceiling. Feeble flickering light barely allows you to see what's going on.

"Seems like not much is going on." - Even repeats your thoughts. - "Nice decor. As long as you don't look at it... Or listen to it." - It adds after a sudden clatter, as if a metal piece got torn off something and fell. - "At least we don't need loading screens to get here. Feel the next gen power."

**ID: 34**  
"Where are we?"

**ID: 34**

**Subtext:** "Any idea where we are, Even? This place looks strangely familiar, yet I don't recall ever being here."

**Text:** Even's voice suddenly changes, it sounds like several different one's mixed together.

"We are in the Bridge, Soai. The real Bridge, not the virtual one in zerOne. Every tower's corner is surveilled, so cameras and all sorts of recording devices are everywhere, thus we can see it all." - It gets quiet for a moment. - "Wait. How do I know this? Like it's always been in my memory, I just didn't need to access it. And once I did, it just popped out. Weird..."

Even keeps observing the surroundings,



then adds.  
“Hm, there’s more. I can actually switch between the real and virtual Bridge. Here.”  
You see a new button in your UI.  
“Let’s give it a try.”

**ID: 35** **Ap.Sw.**  
zerOne: true

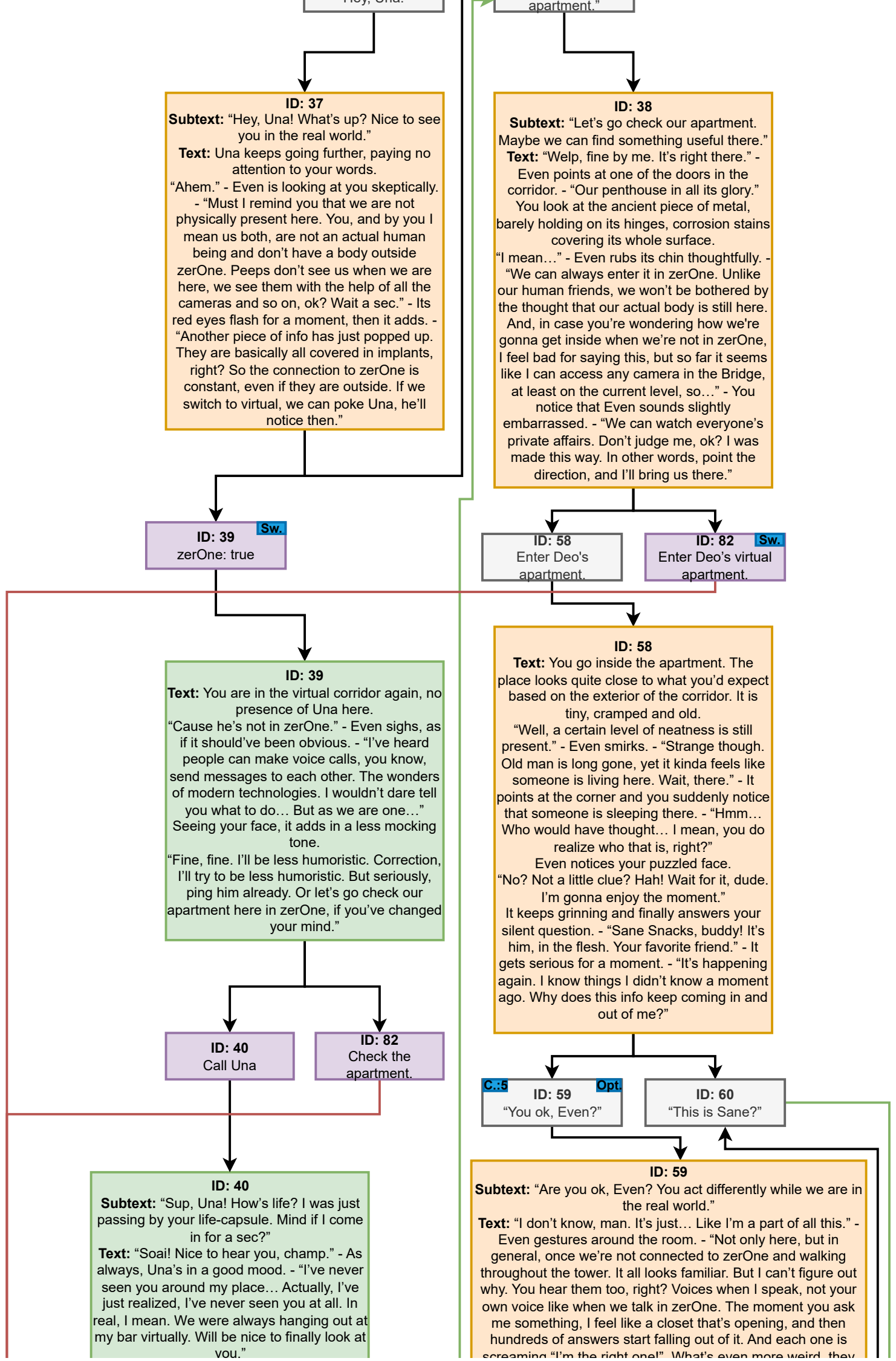
**ID: 35**  
**Text:** After pressing the button everything fades for a moment once more and you see a new place.  
“Not really new, buddy.” - You notice that Even’s voice resembles yours again. -  
“Same corridor, but with a touch of digital love now.”  
You realize that’s true. The place looks different, but it’s still a long narrow hall, its walls and ceiling are illuminated by bright yellow-green lights. No rust or leaking tubes are visible.  
“Prettier, right? Unless you are an abstractionist by nature and prefer life in brown shades, which I doubt.” - Even points at the end of the corridor. - “We’re near your place, by the way. Technically, it’s Deo’s place, as you’ve been stuck in the loop, never actually been out and yada, yada, remember? Maybe we can check it. Though, one more thing.”  
Another button appears in your UI.  
“In case we need to face that hard reality of ours and switch back to the Bridge out there.”

**ID: 36** **Ap.Sw.**  
zerOne: false

**ID: 36**  
**Text:** “Ok, and I’m gonna move to your UI now. After all I’m some kind of it anyway. Take a peek at the upper right corner, see me? I’m a cute little icon there, alright?”  
Even seems to be puzzled and talks in a mix of voices now.  
“I feel like some storage device, keeping stuff inside me, but not knowing what’s actually there. Then, the moment I see something... or we see something, it’s like I’ve known it all along. A strange real world side effect or whatever.”  
It gets quiet for a moment and you notice a man going through the corridor. He wears old-fashioned black glasses, has a beard, long hair and a never fading rebel-youth expression on his face despite the not so young age.  
“Well, look at this individual.” - Even produces a sound of clicking its tongue. - “Una Ek, the one and only owner of the Mnemonic bar and also a friend of ours. Exactly the same in both worlds. True to himself as ever.”  
The man passes by you without noticing and goes further.

**ID: 37**  
“Hev Unal”

**ID: 38**  
“Let’s check our



You notice a facepalm coming from Even's side. - "See where this is going?" - It leans towards you and whispers. - "You either have to tell him the truth or find a reason to meet in zerOne as usual."

**ID: 41**  
Come clean.

**ID: 47**  
"Can we talk virtually?"

**ID: 41**  
**Subtext:** "So, listen Una, there's something I need to tell you first..."  
**Text:** "What's that?" - Una interrupts you. - "You are not real and have been sent here by some higher power?"  
"Well, I've never thought of myself as of a higher power, but since he's mentioned it." - Even says thoughtfully in the middle of Una's speech.  
"You are an agent of the AI system that rules our world?"  
"How does he know that?" - Even sounds surprised.  
"You are going to make me an offer I can't refuse?"  
"Ok, I see, he's joking."  
"Just kidding, man." - Una laughs, then notices your silence. - "Something's wrong?" You tell Una everything. About you, Deo, Even, everything. A long pause hangs between the two of you.  
"Come inside." - He finally says in a hoarse voice. - "Ah, yeah, you can't come... Fine, join the video call, I'm in no mood to log into zerOne at the moment. I'll project you in front of my couch."

**ID: 42** **Sw.**  
Enter Una's apartment.

**ID: 42**  
**Text:** You enter the apartment and see Una on the couch, holding an old-looking guitar in his hands, playing some simple tune. The place is quite different from the corridor outside. Warm lights illuminate the room, everything is clean and the furniture is almost like new.  
"Wow." - Even glances around. - "How did he manage to get a life-capsule like this?"  
"Knew a few gents back in my days." - Focused on his guitar, Una says to you. - "Neighbor switched levels a while ago, nobody moved in, I pulled a string or two, broke the wall, made for myself one small cubicle out of a couple of tiny ones."  
"Wait." - Even moves closer to Una. - "You can hear me? I wanted to..."  
"Join the call, Soai, I don't like not seeing who I am talking to." - Una nods at the

**ID: 47**  
**Subtext:** "Uhm, sorry, but I'm so used to spending most of my life in zerOne that I feel nervous talking outside. Mind if we meet as usual?"  
**Text:** "Nervous, huh?"  
Una sounds a bit disappointed.  
"Oh, well, can't blame you. Peeps nowadays are scared of reality, and I get it. It's killing us after all. Slowly but surely."  
He sighs, gets silent for a moment, then adds.  
"Fine, join the video call, I'm in no mood to log into zerOne right now. I'll project you in front of my couch."

**ID: 48** **Sw.**  
Join the call.

**ID: 48**  
**Text:** You connect to the video call and enter the apartment. You see Una on the couch, holding an old-looking guitar in his hands, playing some simple tune. The place is quite different from the corridor outside. Warm lights illuminate the room, everything is clean and the furniture is almost like new.  
"Wow." - Even glances around. - "How did he manage to get a life-capsule like this?"  
"Knew a few gents back in my days." - Focused on his guitar, Una says to you. - "Neighbor switched levels a while ago, nobody moved in, I pulled a string or two, broke the wall, made for myself one small cubicle out of a couple of tiny ones."  
"Wait." - Even moves closer to Una. - "Why can he hear me..."  
"So, what's new, Soai?" - Una pays no attention to Even's words. - "I've heard you almost won the last Writers Fight, but kinda gave up. What happened?"  
"Ok, never mind, just a coincidence." - Even sighs. - "I'm in your artificial head only."

**ID: 49** **Opt.**  
"Let's interact in"

screaming "I'm the right one! : What's even more weird, they are all the right ones, just slightly different. As if someone has filled this cupboard with countless identical instruments instead of just one. And I'm like some internet forum in the ancient days, where you ask a question and get a million different replies. Then I'm doing my best to gather them under one."  
Even sighs loudly.  
"I'm not supposed to feel tired, am I? Then what is that inside me every time I talk? Someone recorded what the tiredness should feel like, and I'm just imitating it?"  
You don't know what to say to that, and you both stare at Sane sleeping in the corner.  
"Phew..." - Even finally talks. - "I doubt either of us can produce an adequate response to this at the moment." - It points at Sane. - "Let's focus on the reality of the situation."

**ID: 60**  
**Subtext:** "Are you sure this is Sane? We're talking about the same Sane, right? Huge guy, a bit crazy when it comes to post apocalyptic topics. Always talks in a low thunderous voice and keeps saying how important it is to not be mediocre?"  
**Text:** "Oh what a day..." - Even shakes its head skeptically. - "What a lovely day to not believe me. Have I said something that isn't true so far? Yes, it's that kind of Sane. You do remember that you only met him in zerOne and only when you were a loopy boy? Now we're seeing him in reality. I do admit though, this scrawny young man doesn't look like his virtual image at all. He's surely spent all his experience points on strength and brutality, if you get my meaning."  
Even gets closer to Sane.  
"I wonder what he's doing here. Shall we wake him up? Connect to zerOne, ping him, you know the drill."

**C.:6 ID: 70** **Opt.**  
"Let's look around."

**ID: 61** **Sw.**  
zerOne: true

**ID: 70**  
**Subtext:** "Let's have a look around. See anything we could use here?"  
**Text:** "Unless you've learnt how to grow a pair of material hands, no." - Even walks around the room. - "One perfectly standard life-capsule. A place to sleep, eat and connect to zerOne. Everything one could wish for. As long as your wishes are related to living in a digital world."  
You observe the place, yet can't find anything of use. Besides, as Even said, you are not able to physically interact with real objects.  
"Apartments got slightly bigger several years ago." - Even starts talking in a multitude of voices. - "They couldn't fill them all anymore, so it was decided to increase the size to make levels look more populated. Can you imagine how small they were before? Anyway, based on the current state, they might need to consider a new wave of renovations. By rough calculation, less than half of the level is occupied."  
Even blinks a few times before continuing. - "Great. The farseer rabbit woke up again. Oh well, let us proceed." - It gives the room one more glance. - "Nothing of

**ID: 53**

screen in front of him and you appear there.  
- "Where's your friend? The rabbit is going to join the conversation?"  
"Ok, never mind, just a coincidence." - Even sighs. - "I'm in your artificial head only."

**ID: 43**  
"Even is right here."

**ID: 43**  
**Subtext:** "Even is right here, with us. I don't think anyone except for me can see or hear it."  
**Text:** "Too bad." - Una keeps playing the guitar. - "Don't like invisible friends, makes me nervous."  
"Well, if it's any consolation, I can't do much about this either." - Even shrugs. - "I wish I..."  
"If it's talking right now," - Una unintentionally interrupts again. - "Tell it to shut up."  
"You shut up!" - Even stomps to the other side of the room, muttering. - "Ain't gonna talk to some amateur musician anyway..."  
"So, arena character, huh?" - Una briefly glances at the screen. - "Made by some no longer living poet? I knew something was off about you, virtual boy. You kept coming to Mnemonic, kept sitting there, so focused on Writers Fights, on winning. Day after day. Was just too much, even for a poet. Felt unreal, but, when I'm in the unreal world, I tend not to ask too many questions. Everyone's picking their own poison, I'm no judge for that."

**ID: 54**  
"Any advice?"

**ID: 44**  
"We all grind."

**ID: 44**  
**Subtext:** "We all grind. Having a routine helps sometimes. Take your apartment renovations for instance. Bet you've spent your fair share of hours making sure your digital place and your digital you look exactly the same as here, outside zerOne."  
**Text:** "You've got me there, pal."  
Una replies, lazily pulling the strings. "I'm used to seeing people do the same stuff on repeat. And, yeah, my virtual life is identical to the real one. Grinding is part of the whole concept zerOne is built upon. Makes you stick to it, not wanting to come back to reality. As there's nothing here anymore. Life is just a four-walled box to exist while all the living is happening between zeros and ones."  
The music gets louder, it feels like Una is singing rather than talking.

Lost interest in Writers Fights."

"Need to find Arika."

interest here, Soai, we better move on."

**ID: 49**  
**Subtext:** "I guess I've just realized I'm not really interested in winning anymore. Constant grind, hoping that it'll bring me somewhere, but in the end it's just more grinding. I felt... tired."  
**Text:** "Well, I surely didn't expect that coming from you." - Una replies, lazily pulling the strings. - "Seems like I've got too used to seeing people do the same stuff on repeat. Even me. Grinding is part of the whole concept zerOne is built upon. Makes you stick to it, not wanting to come back to reality. As there's nothing here anymore. Life is just a four-walled box to exist while all the living is happening between zeros and ones."  
The music gets louder, it feels like Una is singing rather than talking.  
"When you said you wanted to come in, I was glad, thought I'll be able to interact with someone in real. Man, I miss it. When I go outside, there's no one, I'm wandering alone through our level, looking at the ancient walls, hearing dying machines somewhere deep inside the tower. Sometimes I see others, but, well, frankly speaking, they're like zombies, crawling out of their places by some necessity, fearing talking to anyone else, hurrying to come back and connect to zerOne. And I don't blame them. Can't believe I'm saying this, but it's probably the only possible solution to our planet's little issue."  
Una stops talking for a moment, focusing on his guitar again.  
"There are some benefits though. Nobody's telling me what to do, nobody's preventing me from taking stuff from the empty life-capsules. Did you know that they are not really being refilled with new folk once former inhabitants either switch levels or sing their literal last songs? From time to time new faces arrive, but that rarely happens, almost never, to be precise. So, I'm free to take whatever I want. Not like anyone needs it anyway, and I like spending time trying to make my piece of reality a little bit cozier."  
He gets silent and rubs his forehead.  
"Damn, I'm getting old... You made me talky, Soai. What about you? Any plans now, since arenas got less attractive to you?"

**ID: 50**  
"Need to find Arika."

**ID: 50**  
**Subtext:** "In the last Fight there was a new participant. A girl named Arika. She... knew something about me. We talked for a bit, but then she disappeared. I need to try finding out what happened."  
**Text:** After you've described Arika to Una,

**ID: 53**  
**Subtext:** "Long story. Maybe I'll tell you some other time. Wanted to ask you something else. In the last Fight there was a new participant. A girl named Arika. She... knew something about me. We talked for a bit, but then she disappeared. I need to try finding out what happened."  
**Text:** "After you've described Arika to Una, he gets silent for a moment, playing the guitar."  
"Want my opinion?" - He finally says. - "I wouldn't be too worried about her. Based on what you've mentioned, she's one of the rich folk. Playing around with others just to entertain themselves. Then, the moment they get bored, poof..." - Una hits a guitar string, making a loud noise. - "They are outta here. But you do you, edge runner, don't make the blades of my words stop you. I'm just an angry old fella, yelling at the toxic sky, happy to be wrong, yet not having lots of hope." - Una points his finger at you. - "Maybe you'll find that Goldilocks of yours and drive to the sunset. Perhaps, out of principle, she'll be able to provide you with just the right amount of further choices. As for where to find her, sorry, not my area of expertise."

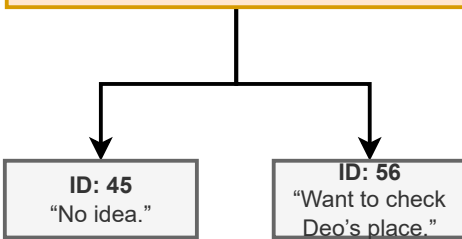
**ID: 61**  
**Text:** You are in your virtual apartment now.  
"Well, everything is the same as when you were living your pre-ventful life." - Even produces a satisfied chuckle. - "Notice what I did there?" - Seeing no reaction, it keeps talking. - "All seems to be as it was before. At least based on what I can check in your memory, as we were not together back then. Ever wonder how Deo put you in that repetitive state? The loop itself was more about your behavior rather than actually rewinding you each time, thus people you interacted with still know you. You just kept doing the same thing day after day, with some occasional contacts with the others. You simply never questioned the fact that you appeared out of nowhere and have no idea of who you are and where you came from. And the part where you were waking up every day and logging into zerOne was just loaded into you as a memory." - Even shrugs. - "I mean, you don't need to wake up and log in when you're a part of it, right? So, it was just a bit of a behavioral adjustment to create some sort of a daily routine looking like real life."  
You examine the digital version of your life-capsule and don't notice



And now the numbers have managed to reach me even here, in my four-walled box.”  
- He nods at you. - “When you said you wanted to come in, I was glad, thought I’ll be able to interact with someone in real. Man, I miss it. When I go outside, there’s no one, I’m wandering alone through our level, looking at the ancient walls, hearing dying machines somewhere deep inside the tower. Sometimes I see others, but, well, frankly speaking, they’re like zombies, crawling out of their places by some necessity, fearing talking to anyone else, hurrying to come back and connect to zerOne. And I don’t blame them. Can’t believe I’m saying this, but it’s probably the only possible solution to our planet’s little issue.”  
Una stops talking for a moment, focusing on his guitar again.

“There are some benefits though. Nobody’s telling me what to do, nobody’s preventing me from taking stuff from the empty life-capsules. Did you know that they are not really being refilled with new folk once former inhabitants either switch levels or sing their literal last songs? From time to time new faces arrive, but that rarely happens, almost never, to be precise. So, I’m free to take whatever I want. Not like anyone needs it anyway, and I like spending time trying to make my piece of reality a little bit cozier.”

He gets silent and rubs his forehead.  
“Damn, I’m getting old... You made me talky, digital boy. What about you? Any plans now, since you’ve figured out who you are?”



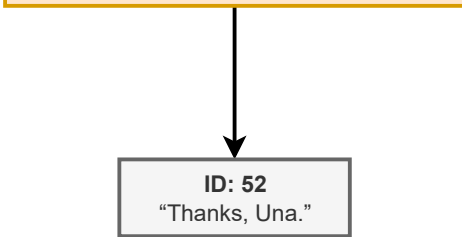
**ID: 45**  
**Subtext:** “Honestly? No idea. I’m like a leaf on the wind. I guess I need to figure out what Deo wanted from me. And that girl, Arika... She disappeared somewhere.”  
**Text:** “I wouldn’t be too worried about her. Based on what you’ve said, she’s one of the rich folk. Playing around with others just to entertain themselves. Then, the moment they get bored, poof...” - Una hits a guitar string, making a loud noise. - “They are outta here. But you do you, edge runner, don’t make the blades of my words stop you. I’m just an angry old fella, yelling at the digital sky, happy to be wrong, yet not having lots of hope.”

“Speaking of the old fellas...” - Una raises a brow, looking at you. - “That Deo article, eh? I guess you intend to make a little jump to the first level, since you’re not afraid of dying anymore, and he seems to have spent his final hours there. I’m not much of a hacker, but one day I was willing to visit the place myself. Ended up being too depressed for it, so gave up on the idea, but before that I had a little chat with our friendly Dixie’s shop owner, Nnif. She might know a thing or two on how to bypass the levels’ security and enter a wonderful world of those who are closer to the surface. I don’t know much more, so consider paying Nnif a visit. Maybe

he gets silent for a moment, playing the guitar.  
“Want my opinion?” - He finally says. - “I wouldn’t be too worried about her. Based on what you’ve mentioned, she’s one of the rich folk. Playing around with others just to entertain themselves. Then, the moment they get bored, poof...” - Una hits a guitar string, making a loud noise. - “They are outta here. But you do you, edge runner, don’t make the blades of my words stop you. I’m just an angry old fella, yelling at the toxic sky, happy to be wrong, yet not having lots of hope.” - Una points his finger at you. - “Maybe you’ll find that Goldilocks of yours and drive to the sunset. Perhaps, out of principle, she’ll be able to provide you with just the right amount of further choices.”

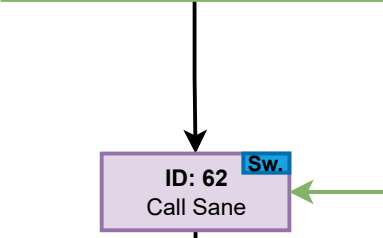


**ID: 51**  
**Subtext:** “That might sound crazy, but I sort of need to visit the first level. Any idea how I can do that?”  
**Text:** “You’re kidding, right?” - Una’s brows fly up. - “First level? What for? You’ll be breathing toxins and approaching the light at the end of the tunnel in no time if you go there.”  
“Just a reminder,” - Even appears in front of you. - “He doesn’t know that we aren’t scared of breathing toxins anymore.”  
“I mean...” - Una hesitates for a second. - “Have to be honest, I had the desire myself a while ago, but...” - It looks like he wants to tell you something, but then just shakes his head. - “Nah, man, nevermind. Just don’t do it, ok? We’ve a little time to live, so we have to live a little.” - He starts playing the guitar again. - “Want some adventures? Go hang out with our mutual friend Sane Snacks. Haven’t seen the big dude recently. If you find him, tell him he still owes me for the deluxe tickets to the Soundcore of Mirror concert, ok? Actually, forget it, consider this my treat. The giant always lifts my mood up.”

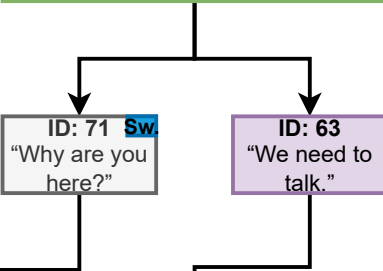


**ID: 52**  
**Subtext:** “Thanks, Una. Appreciate the advice.”  
**Text:** “No prob, mate. Go find some new hobby to live up to, since Writers Fights is not your jam anymore. I suggest going out. Checking what the real Bridge is. Can be

any differences. Same place you’ve been living in, nothing new.  
“I think the old man just used a standard template for an apartment.”  
- Even says in the end. - “Doubt he was doing anything special here himself. Let’s call Sane.”



**ID: 62**  
**Text:** You call Sane. After a while he finally replies.  
“Khmm, hey Soai.”  
For a moment you hear him talking in a thin, breaking voice.  
“Oops... Sec.”  
After a pause you hear Sane’s regular low roaring voice.  
“Soai! My favorite friend! How are things, buddy? Heard you’ve given up on the arena fights. Nice! Glad to see you finally decided to be free of that vicious cycle. Wanna hang out? I’ve just uploaded a new version of There and Back Again with a few custom mods. How about a round or two?”



**ID: 63**  
**Subtext:** “Sane, I need to tell you something...”  
**Text:** You decide to tell Sane everything, but, the moment you start, he interrupts you with excitement.  
“Cool! So, it finally happened.”  
“That’s a strange reaction.” - Even squints at Sane. - “As if he’s been waiting for this.”  
“I’ve been waiting for this.” - Young man keeps talking. - “Deo told me about you. Said you might need my help at some point, but asked not to tell you anything and keep pretending that I don’t know your little secret.”  
“I wonder if he knows about me as well?” - Even glances at Sane with interest.  
“Deo said you’ll have some kind of a virtual companion! Man, how cool is that! If I had one, it would be a giant black dragon! I bet you have something like it.”  
“Well...” - Even rubs its little rabbit ear. - “In a way I’m also a beast...”  
“Nevermind.” - Sane can’t stop



more, so consider paying Nnif a visit. Maybe she'll do you a favor. Or," - Una points his finger at you. - "Try to find that Goldilocks of yours and drive to the sunset. Perhaps, out of principle, she'll be able to provide you with just the right amount of further choices."

**C::4**  
**ID: 46**  
"Thanks, Una."

**ID: 46**  
**Subtext:** "Thanks, Una. Appreciate the advice. And... Well, sorry for all the AI stuff."  
**Text:** "Don't mention it, pal." - Una puts the guitar aside and looks at you. - "Being what you're seems to be not your fault, so no skin off our digital backs here. Just keep being a nice guy, deal? Ah, yeah, tell your rabbit to not hold too much grudge against me. When it comes to talking to computers, old Una has trust issues, ok? But, if it's a part of you, it's probably not so bad."  
"Pf-f-f..." - Even glances over its shoulder. - "Whatever... He's fine... at times."  
"Right, now get outta here." - Una waves towards the door. - "I need to meditate on the whole situation before getting back to my bar. Sooner or later we all end up in zerOne. See you when I see you."

**ID: 57**  
Leave Una's apartment.

**ID: 54**  
**Subtext:** "I guess my poison was picked for me... Since I'm here, any advice? This digital ocean has too many variables to take into account. I'm wondering what I should do next. Find Arika? Get more info on Deo's plan?"  
**Text:** "You've got the wrong guy to ask for directions, pal." - Una glances at you above his glasses. - "If I were you, chances are I'd just chill, looking at the tsunami coming right at me. But I'm not you. So, the options of finding Miss Yelloweyes or figuring out what kind of Frankenstein you are seem both relatively irrelevant to me. Besides, I don't like telling folk what to do. You have to tell your own story, otherwise it'll be someone else's."  
Una stands up, puts his guitar aside and looks at you.  
"Despite being what you're, you still look like a nice guy, Soai. But I'm just too damn old and stubborn when it comes to giving counsel. Sorry, don't have much else to say."

hugely depressive, but also opens your eyes for a split second. There's a whole dying world out there."  
Una waves towards the door.  
"Right, I should stop with all the grim thoughts. Get outta here already or we'll become a pair of doomsayers, screaming about the end and how nigh it is. To that I say nay, I need to chill a little before getting back to my bar. See you when I see you."

**ID: 56**  
**Subtext:** "My... Well, Deo's place is nearby. So, I'll probably go check it now. Maybe I can find some answers or, at least, further directions there."  
**Text:** "Sounds legit." - Una nods thoughtfully. - "Weird. I've never seen that Deo before, though his place is next to mine. I guess he was quite a hermit. Man, what have we become? There's someone living right next door and we've no idea who that is. Another neighbor we don't care about. Jokes on us though, as we're also that same neighbor for the rest of the world." After a pause accompanied by a new tune, he keeps talking.  
"I assume you might have an intention to make a little jump to the first level, since you're not afraid of dying anymore, and Deo seems to have spent his final hours there. I'm not much of a hacker, but one day I was willing to visit the place myself. Ended up being too depressed for it, so gave up on the idea, but before that I had a little chat with our friendly Dixie's shop owner, Nnif. She might know a thing or two on how to bypass the levels' security and enter a wonderful world of those who are closer to the surface. I don't know much more, so consider paying Nnif a visit. Maybe she'll do you a favor."

**ID: 57**  
**Subtext:** "Always thought Una is in constant positivity mode. But in reality he sounds quite sad. Like he's seen it all and doesn't hope for any good outcome."  
**Text:** "It's hard to be an analog man while living in a digital world, Soai." - Even replies thoughtfully once you exit Una's life-capsule. - "He wants to be the same in both worlds, but, as we saw, it's only half-true. Try all you want, in zerOne you pretend to be someone else. The only difference with the rest is that he's escaping from virtuality while they are running away from reality."  
Even looks around the corridor, then adds after a pause.  
"Alright, one choice at a time. How shall we proceed, almighty user of mine?"

**ID: 87** **Sw.**

talking. - "Dude, why are you not saying anything? I want to know more. How does it feel to be an arena character?"

**ID: 64**  
"How do you know Deo?"

**C::8 ID: 88 Opt**  
"Can't really tell."

**ID: 64**  
**Subtext:** "Wait a minute. You know Deo?"  
**Text:** "Yeah, since he let me live in his place." - Sane replies as if it was obvious. - "I was... let's say, in need of an apartment, his wasn't occupied, so I kinda slipped in. Then he contacted me in zerOne, told me about you and said that I can stay here. I haven't heard from him for a while. Since you took part in the last Writers Fight actually. Perhaps he was busy with your tuning or whatever."  
"Soai..." - Even says quietly. - "He doesn't know that Deo's gone. I remember now. Same as with the projection you talked to in the arena loophole, once you've figured it all out and I was loaded into you, all Deo's connections to the world have been cut off. In fact, I was the one doing the cutting, as it was no longer needed. In other words, Sane never talked to the real Deo. Old man probably left something similar to his arena version here. A projection of a sort, to keep an eye on the life-capsule. And now it's also gone. I guess we should tell him."

**ID: 65**  
"About Deo..."

**ID: 65**  
**Subtext:** "Sorry, Sane, but the truth is, Deo is long gone. We both talked to his virtual projection."  
**Text:** "Oh..." - Once you tell him about Deo, Sane gets quiet. - "That explains some of his weird replies when we were talking. I thought it was just because he's a lonely old fellow looking for an audience to listen to his endless stories. But this thing was just set up to talk to occasional strangers like me. Pretty advanced projection though. Remember when we last met I offered you some sort of a rewind option, so you could start that arena attempt again? Deo let me install a

**ID: 55**  
"Thanks anyway."

**ID: 55**  
**Subtext:** "I see. Well, thanks anyway, Una. And... Sorry for all the AI stuff."  
**Text:** "Not your fault, mate. Just keep being a nice guy, deal? Ah, yeah, tell your rabbit to not hold too much grudge against me. When it comes to talking to computers, old Una has trust issues, ok? But, if it's a part of you, it's probably not so bad."  
"Pf-f-f..." - Even glances over its shoulder. -  
"Whatever... He's fine... at times."  
"Right, now get outta here." - Una waves towards the door. - "I need to meditate on the whole situation before getting back to my bar. See you when I see you."

**C:7 ID: 78 Opt**  
"Place looks the same as mine."

**ID: 78**  
**Subtext:** "Our zerOne places look the same. I thought you'd prefer changing yours."  
**Text:** "Meh..." - Sane glances around. - "Can't say I care much about the look of it. Same for the real world and zerOne. I'm fine being in both, there's just not much to do in the Bridge, so I have to stay on my big virtual guy most of the time." - He points at his chest with his thumb. - "That's my one exception. Spent quite some time choosing appearance and voice. Looks nothing like the real me. Wanted to be bigger, you know. Growing muscles is not really an option nowadays."  
"He's right actually." - Even adds. - "Passive way of life and lack of exercises are compensated by extremely basic rations provided by the towers. Barely enough to keep the somewhat normal body functioning. Not the best time to become a bodybuilder. A literal no pain, no gain."

**C:7 ID: 79 Opt**  
"Never saw you here before."

**ID: 79**  
**Subtext:** "I've just realized that I never saw you in my apartment before. Yet you've been living here the whole time."

zerOne: true

**ID: 71**  
**Subtext:** "What are you doing in my apartment, Sane?"  
**Text:** "What do you mean, in your apartment? You've come to my place, dude. Wait a minute..." - Sane looks at you closely. - "Do you see me in real life?" - He waves his hand in front of your face. - "You've called me in zerOne, but you're actually looking at me outside of it, right? Cool! So, it finally happened."  
"That's a strange reaction." - Even squints at Sane. - "As if he's been waiting for this."  
"I've been waiting for this." - Young man keeps talking, no sound of his thunderous voice anymore, just a thin breaking one. - "Deo told me about you. Said you might need my help at some point, but asked not to tell you anything and keep pretending that I don't know your little secret."  
"I wonder if he knows about me as well?" - Even glances at Sane with interest.  
"Deo said you'll have some kind of a virtual companion! Man, how cool is that! If I had one, it would be a giant black dragon! I bet you have something like it."  
"Well..." - Even rubs its little rabbit ear. - "In a way I'm also a beast..."  
"Nevermind." - Sane can't stop talking. - "Dude, why are you not saying anything? I want to know more. How does it feel to be an arena character?"

**ID: 72**  
"How do you know Deo?"

**C:8 ID: 89 Opt**  
"Can't really tell."

**ID: 72**  
**Subtext:** "Wait a minute. You know Deo?"  
**Text:** "Yeah, since he let me live in his place." - Sane replies as if it was obvious. - "I was... let's say, in need of an apartment, his wasn't occupied, so I kinda slipped in. Then he contacted me in zerOne, told me about you and said that I can stay here. I haven't heard from him for a while. Since you took part in the last Writers Fight actually. Perhaps he was busy with your tuning or whatever."  
"Soai..." - Even says quietly. - "He doesn't know that Deo's gone. I remember now. Same as with the projection you talked to in the arena loophole, once you've figured it all out and I was loaded into you, all Deo's connections to the world have been cut off. In fact, I was the one doing the cutting, as it was no longer needed. In

attempt again? Deo let me install a special module to my zerOne character, and with it I am able to do that. He said maybe you'll ask for it one day. Pretty useless thing, to my mind. It just wipes your daily loop and sends you to the beginning of it."  
"Heh, bet you still used it." - Even adds in a mocking tone, looking at you. - "Or, at least, seriously considered it."

**ID: 66**  
"You live alone?"

**ID: 66**  
**Subtext:** "You live alone? No relatives or friends?"  
**Text:** "Nah, man..." - Sane waves his hand. - "Well, except for you, Una... and Deo I guess. Have you seen the real Bridge? Everything is like some grim bunker with nobody inside. Once I settled here, I've been mostly hanging out with you in zerOne or figuring out how to not go further down to the first level. Speaking of the first level..." - Sane rubs his chin. - "Deo, or his projection, said that you might want to go there. Don't know why exactly, he didn't tell. What he did tell is to help you install an additional module to your companion."  
"That's me, rabbit with a dragon soul." - Even sounds wary. - "I already have enough of the unknown inside. What's that supposed to be? Damn it," - It adds in the end. - "Keep forgetting that nobody except you sees or hears me."  
Having no notion of Even's words, Sane keeps talking. - "I don't know much, he just told me to show you this. Looks ancient." He snaps his fingers and you see a red square with a gray circle in the middle. It's floating in front of you, slowly turning around.  
"It's called a floppy disk." - Even explains to you. - "People used to store information on them in the old times. I mean, we are in zerOne, so it's just a visual appearance. Old man had some strange way of expressing himself. Especially given the fact that he was born not even close to the time when this was still in use. Well, who cares. I don't think we have any other option except for installing it. Go ahead."

**ID: 67**  
Take the floppy disk.

**ID: 67**  
**Text:** The moment you touch the disk, your vision glitches and you see countless

**Text:** "Well, it's rather simple." - Sane shrugs rather indifferently. - "I mean, Deo just stored your version of the apartment on a different layer. If he managed to make something like you, it should have been quite simple to bypass zerOne restrictions and add another apartment on top of this one. It's all virtual after all, and you didn't enter the real world back then and didn't see me here."  
"I could've also explained that, you know. Trust issues already?" - Even adds resentfully. - "Otherwise, yeah, basically what the young man said."

other words, Sane never talked to the real Deo. Old man probably left something similar to his arena version here. A projection of a sort, to keep an eye on the life-capsule. And now it's also gone. I guess we should tell him."

**ID: 73**  
"About Deo..."

vision glitches and you see countless colorful artifacts around you. They look like a structure of a building, a skeleton without organs and muscles.  
"Woah..." - Even exclaims. - "Here is our ticket to the first level. This thingy has just granted me access to the cameras there. We can watch the feed and do the same stuff as we do here, on the second level. Although..." - Even thinks about something for a moment. - "We still don't have access to zerOne, so we won't be able to switch to it or to interact with the others there."  
"You alright, Soai?" - Sane asks after seeing your puzzled face.

**ID: 68**  
"Anything else from Deo?"

**ID: 82**  
**Text:** You are in your virtual apartment now.  
"Well, everything is the same as when you were living your pre-eventful life." - Even produces a satisfied chuckle. - "Notice what I did there?" - Seeing no reaction, it keeps talking. - "All seems to be as it was before. At least based on what I can check in your memory, as we were not together back then. Ever wonder how Deo put you in that repetitive state? The loop itself was more about your behavior rather than actually rewinding you each time, thus people you interacted with still know you. You just kept doing the same thing day after day, with some occasional contacts with the others. You simply never questioned the fact that you appeared out of nowhere and have no idea of who you are and where you came from. And the part where you were waking up every day and logging into zerOne was just loaded into you as a memory." - Even shrugs. - "I mean, you don't need to wake up and log in when you're a part of it, right? So, it was just a bit of a behavioral adjustment to create some sort of a daily routine looking like real life."  
You examine the digital version of your life-capsule and don't notice any differences. Same place you've been living in, nothing new.  
"I think the old man just used a standard template for an apartment." - Even says in the end. - "Doubt he was doing anything special here himself. Guess we should check the real version now."

**ID: 73**  
**Subtext:** "Sorry, Sane, but the truth is, Deo is long gone. We both talked to his virtual projection."  
**Text:** "Oh..." - Once you tell him about Deo, Sane gets quiet. - "That explains some of his weird replies when we were talking. I thought it was just because he's a lonely old fellow looking for an audience to listen to his endless stories. But this thing was just set up to talk to occasional strangers like me. Pretty advanced projection though.  
Remember when we last met I offered you some sort of a rewind option, so you could start that arena attempt again? Deo let me install a special module to my zerOne character, and with it I am able to do that. He said maybe you'll ask for it one day. Pretty useless thing, to my mind. It just wipes your daily loop and sends you to the beginning of it."  
"Heh, bet you still used it." - Even adds in a mocking tone, looking at you. - "Or, at least, seriously considered it."

**ID: 68**  
**Subtext:** "Did the old man leave anything else for me?"  
**Text:** "No, nothing else." - Sane shakes his head. - "Just this red square. He mentioned something about the rabbit though. I think his words were: "Tame the rabbit if you need to go deeper.". He also said that you shouldn't fully trust it. I didn't get the meaning, but he insisted on telling you that.  
"Great." - Even flies around Sane's character. - "Why do I need taming and why you shouldn't trust me. I'm basically you. Do you trust yourself?" - It keeps talking while pacing through the virtual apartment. - "Maybe he meant me. Maybe you're my rabbit and I should tame you, Soai. Should I trust you?"  
Seeing that you're silent, Sane continues. - "Also, Deo asked me to add that, if you don't know where to go next, go to where it has begun."  
"Ok, I see." - Even sounds slightly irritated. - "He wanted us to go to the arena again. To the loophole where we first met. Could've just said that, without any advice on trust. We can go right away. I should be able to open the shortcut for us. Maybe there's a CD this time." - Seeing your face, Even clarifies. - "Another ancient device to store data... Nevermind, I meant that we might find a way to enter the first level's zerOne there."

**ID: 74**  
"You live alone?"

**ID: 76 Opt**  
"Never saw you here before."  
**ID: 69**  
"Need to go, Sane."  
**ID: 77 Opt**  
"Place looks the same as mine."  
**ID: 69**  
**Subtext:** "Thanks for your help, Sane. Sorry, but I need to go now."  
**Text:** "Already?"  
Sane sounds sad.  
"Oh well, if you must, then go, sure."

**ID: 74**  
**Subtext:** "You live alone? No relatives or friends?"  
**Text:** "Nah, man..." - Sane waves his hand. - "Well, except for you, Una... and Deo I guess. Have you seen the real Bridge? Everything is like some grim bunker with nobody inside. Once I settled here, I've been mostly hanging out with you in zerOne or figuring out how to not go further down to the first level. Speaking of the first level..." - Sane rubs his chin. - "Deo, or his projection, said that you might want to go there. Don't know why exactly, he didn't tell. What he did tell is to help you install an additional

**ID: 83 Sw.**  
zerOne: false

**ID: 83**  
**Text:** The place looks quite close to what you'd expect based on the exterior in the corridor. It is tiny, cramped and old.  
"Well, a certain level of neatness is still present." - Even smirks. - "Strange though. Old man is long gone, yet it



kinda feels like someone is living here. Wait, there." - It points at the corner and you suddenly notice that someone is sleeping there. - "Hmm... Who would have thought... I mean, you do realize who that is, right?"

Even notices your puzzled face. "No? Not a little clue? Hah! Wait for it, dude. I'm gonna enjoy the moment." It keeps grinning and finally answers your silent question. - "Sane Snacks, buddy! It's him, in the flesh. Your favorite friend." - It gets serious for a moment. - "It's happening again. I know things I didn't know a moment ago. Why does this info keep coming in and out of me?"

**C.5** ID: 84 **Opt.**  
"You ok, Even?"

ID: 85  
"This is Sane?"

**ID: 84**  
**Subtext:** "Are you ok, Even? You act differently while we are in the real world."  
**Text:** "I don't know, man. It's just... Like I'm a part of all this." - Even gestures around the room. - "Not only here, but in general, once we're not connected to zerOne and walking throughout the tower. It all looks familiar. But I can't figure out why. You hear them too, right? Voices when I speak, not your own voice like when we talk in zerOne. The moment you ask me something, I feel like a closet that's opening, and then hundreds of answers start falling out of it. And each one is screaming "I'm the right one!". What's even more weird, they are all the right ones, just slightly different. As if someone has filled this cupboard with countless identical instruments instead of just one. And I'm like some internet forum in the ancient days, where you ask a question and get a million different replies. Then I'm doing my best to gather them under one."

Even sighs loudly. "I'm not supposed to feel tired, am I? Then what is that inside me every time I talk? Someone recorded what the tiredness should feel like, and I'm just imitating it?" You don't know what to say to that, and you both stare at Sane sleeping in the corner. "Phew..." - Even finally talks. - "I doubt either of us can produce an adequate response to this at the moment." - It points at Sane. - "Let's focus on the reality of the situation."

**ID: 85**  
**Subtext:** "Are you sure this is Sane? We're talking about the same Sane, right? Huge guy, a bit crazy when it comes to post apocalyptic topics. Always talks in a low thunderous voice and keeps saying how important it is to not be mediocre?"  
**Text:** "Oh what a day..." - Even shakes its head skeptically. - "What a lovely

module to your companion." "That's me, rabbit with a dragon soul." - Even sounds wary. - "I already have enough of the unknown inside. What's that supposed to be? Damn it," - It adds in the end. - "Keep forgetting that nobody except you sees or hears me."

Having no notion of Even's words, Sane keeps talking. - "Switch to zerOne, I'll show you there."

**ID: 75** **Sw.**  
zerOne: true

**ID: 75**  
**Text:** Sane's zerOne character stands nearby, his loud voice rumbling. - "I don't know much, Deo just told me to show you this. Looks ancient." He snaps his fingers and you see a red square with a gray circle in the middle. It's floating in front of you, slowly turning around. "It's called a floppy disk." - Even explains to you. - "People used to store information on them in the old times. I mean, we are in zerOne, so it's just a visual appearance. Old man had some strange way of expressing himself. Especially given the fact that he was born not even close to the time when this was still in use. Well, who cares. I don't think we have any other option except for installing it. Go ahead."

**ID: 90**  
"I should be going."

**ID: 80**  
"Wanna come with me?"

**ID: 80**  
**Subtext:** "I'm heading to the arena actually. Wanna come, visit Shrike with me?"  
**Text:** "Yeah! Sure, man, I can tag along." - Sane exclaims happily. "Friendly reminder." - Even raises a finger. - "We can't visit it in real, ok? There's no actual Shrike arena in the Bridge. Too big for it to fit in. Hence,

Hope I helped a bit. I'd love to hang out one day, you know. Don't need to pretend that I don't know who you are anymore. Would be nice talking to the real you. Well, the real virtual you I guess." He sighs. "Won't be keeping you though. Maybe another time."

**ID: 76**  
**Subtext:** "I've just realized that I never saw you in my apartment before. Yet you've been living here the whole time."  
**Text:** "Well, it's rather simple." - Sane shrugs rather indifferently. - "I mean, Deo just stored your version of the apartment on a different layer. If he managed to make something like you, it should have been quite simple to bypass zerOne restrictions and add another apartment on top of this one. It's all virtual after all, and you didn't enter the real world back then and didn't see me here." "I could've also explained that, you know. Trust issues already?" - Even adds resentfully. - "Otherwise, yeah, basically what the young man said."

**ID: 77**  
**Subtext:** "Our zerOne places look the same. I thought you'd prefer changing yours."  
**Text:** "Meh..." - Sane glances around. - "Can't say I care much about the look of it. Same for the real world and zerOne. I'm fine being in both, there's just not much to do in the Bridge, so I have to stay on my big virtual guy most of the time." - He points at his chest with his thumb. - "That's my one exception. Spent quite some time choosing appearance and voice. Looks nothing like the real me. Wanted to be bigger, you know. Growing muscles is not really an option nowadays." "He's right actually." - Even adds. - "Passive way of life and lack of exercises are compensated by extremely basic rations provided by the towers. Barely enough to keep the somewhat normal body functioning. Not the best time to become a bodybuilder. A literal no pain, no gain."

**ID: 87**  
**Text:** You are in the zerOne version of the corridor now. Even points at one of the panels on the wall. - "An entry to our penthouse in all its glory." You see a sliding piece of yellow-green metal. It looks the same as the rest of the panels around. "Well..." - Even rubs its chin thoughtfully. -

day to not believe me. Have I said something that isn't true so far? Yes, it's that kind of Sane. You do remember that you only met him in zerOne and only when you were a loopy boy? Now we're seeing him in reality. I do admit though, this scrawny young man doesn't look like his virtual image at all. He's surely spent all his experience points on strength and brutality, if you get my meaning."

Even gets closer to Sane.

"I wonder what he's doing here. Shall we wake him up? Connect to zerOne, ping him, you know the drill."

we're making a digital voyage."

"What's up, Soai?" - Sane asks after seeing that you just stand still silently.

"What is up is that my feelings are down!" - Even throws up its hands in the air. - "I have a million things to say and but a single listener. Common, tell him something already and let us go, oh let us go, the keeper of my artificial gates."

"Unlike our human friends, we won't be bothered by the thought that our actual body is still in the real rotting life back there. We don't need this now, but, in case you're wondering how we see everything when we're not in zerOne, I feel bad for saying this, but so far it seems like I can access any camera in the Bridge, at least on the current level, so..." - You notice that Even sounds slightly embarrassed. - "We can watch everyone's private affairs. Don't judge me, ok? I was made this way... Anyway, I suggest we enter the place already."

C:10 ID: 81 Opt.  
"It's Even talking."

ID: 93  
"Let's go to the arena, Sane."

ID: 82  
Enter the apartment.

C:6 ID: 86 Opt.  
"Let's look around."

ID: 86

**Subtext:** "Let's have a look around. See anything we could use here?"

**Text:** "Unless you've learnt how to grow a pair of material hands, no." - Even walks around the room. - "One perfectly standard life-capsule. A place to sleep, eat and connect to zerOne. Everything one could wish for. As long as your wishes are related to living in a digital world."

You observe the place, yet can't find anything of use. Besides, as Even said, you are not able to physically interact with real objects.

"Apartments got slightly bigger several years ago." - Even starts talking in a multitude of voices. - "They couldn't fill them all anymore, so it was decided to increase the size to make levels look more populated. Can you imagine how small they were before? Anyway, based on the current state, they might need to consider a new wave of renovations. By rough calculation, less than half of the level is occupied."

Even blinks a few times before continuing.

- "Great. The farseer rabbit woke up again. Oh well, let us proceed." - It gives the room one more glance. - "Nothing of interest here, Soai, we better move on."

ID: 81

**Subtext:** "Remember the companion you mentioned? I'm talking to it. Nobody else can see or hear it. Its name is Even and it looked like a rabbit once. Now it's more like a distant humanoid-type relative of a rabbit."

**Text:** "Now wait a second!" - Even crosses its arms on its chest. - "What do you mean by that humanoid relative comparison?" - It looks at its hands. - "Oh... I thought I had paws... Hm... Have I performed a digital mutation?"

"Awesome!" - Sane can't hide his excitement. - "Not as cool as a dragon, but still nice!"

"And you cared to mention this only now?" - Even is fully focussed on watching its body. - "Seriously, Soai, let me know if I turn into something new, ok? At least my ears are still there." - It says with a sigh of relief.

"I wish I had a pet." - Sane says thoughtfully.

"I am not a pet! Tell him I'm not a pet!"

"Those you can get in zerOne are kinda boring. Bet yours is much more advanced."

"Of course I am! And I am not a pet!" - Seeing your smile, Even tilts its head. - "Enjoying yourself, aren't you? Not gonna tell him that I'm not a pet, don't you? Fine, fine... I'm not angry... Not angry at all!"

"Well, I guess we can go now." - Sane looks around. - "I don't think there's much left to do at my place."

ID: 88

**Subtext:** "I can't really tell, Sane. I just know it, but, apart from that, I feel the same. You live in both worlds with two different appearances. And I... Though I might be made out of many entities, I'm only present digitally. As for the real life, all I can do is take a peek at it."

**Text:** "That's deep, man." - Sane looks at you with respect. - "But I'm just role-playing, you know. Other than that, my character is only a shell. Not everybody looks at it that way. Peeps got fully consumed by their virtual life. Have you noticed that they talk and act differently in zerOne. I don't get it. But then I can't resist it too... So, guess I'm doing that as well, unintentionally."

"Well, you know what they say..." - Even adds instructively. - "When in zerOne... don't do as humans do."

"On the other hand..." - Sane keeps talking. - "I don't really mind zerOne either. I'm like fifty percent made of digital and fifty of real stuff. Honestly, being in the middle is not always the best disposition. And by not always I mean never. Everyone wants you to pick a side, to live by certain standards, while I just want to live and try to enjoy it."

"I certainly did not expect such a discourse from that young individual." - Even sounds impressed. - "Can't say I agree... But then it only proves his point."

"Deo told me the same thoughts were the reason he came up with an idea to make you." - Sane adds in the end.

ID: 89

**Subtext:** "I can't really tell, Sane. I just know it, but, apart from that, I feel the same. You live in both worlds with two different appearances. And I... Though I might be made out of many entities, I'm only present digitally. As for the real life, all I can do is take a peek at it."

**Text:** "That's deep, man." - Sane looks at you with respect. - "But I'm just role-playing, you know. Other than that, my character is only a shell. Not everybody looks at it that way. Peeps got fully consumed by their virtual life. Have you noticed that they talk and act differently in zerOne. I don't get it. But then I can't resist it too... So, guess I'm doing that as well, unintentionally."

"Well, you know what they say..." - Even adds instructively. - "When in zerOne..."

ID: 90

**Subtext:** "Alright, I should be going now..."

**Text:** "Listen, Soai..." - Sane interrupts you. - "About the rewinding module I mentioned earlier... I mean, maybe it serves some purpose after all. Some hidden feature perhaps? Deo, or his projection, gave it to me for some reason. He said to remind you about it once you know who you are, if I get the chance. I still have it installed. So, dunno why, but if you want to use it again, let me know."

ID: 91

**Subtext:** "Thanks, Sane, but maybe some other time. I've had enough loops for now. Take care, mate. Have a good zerOne."

**Text:** You exit Sane's place accompanied by Even's monologue.

"Have a good zerOne? Seriously? We need to work on your intended puns, master Soai. Next time ask me first, I'll provide you with a variety of options."



"Ok, friendo." - Even looks you in the eye. - "Based on what he said earlier, this thing will send you to the very beginning of our little adventure here, got it? Your progress will be reset permanently. You're at the driver's seat of course, and I'm just a concerned passenger, but do consider my warning please."

ID: 91

"Nah, I'm good."

C.:9

ID: 0

"Loop me away, Sane."

Game restart  
with C.:9.

don't do as humans do."  
"On the other hand..." - Sane keeps talking. - "I don't really mind zerOne either. I'm like fifty percent made of digital and fifty of real stuff. Honestly, being in the middle is not always the best disposition. And by not always I mean never. Everyone wants you to pick a side, to live by certain standards, while I just want to live and try to enjoy it."  
"I certainly did not expect such a discourse from that young individual." - Even sounds impressed. - "Can't say I agree... But then it only proves his point."  
"Deo told me the same thoughts were the reason he came up with an idea to make you." - Sane adds in the end.

while it's talking you keep pondering about Sane.  
"Child of two worlds this one." - As usual, Even follows your thoughts. - "Wondering why at his age he talks and acts like this? Try surviving in the tower all by yourself. He's not in any of the writers guilds, doesn't take part in the fights, and yet manages to stay on the second level. That's a hell of an achievement for a young man. I took a peek at him, well, I mean my multi-voiced unknown feature did that, to be precise. He's the youngest inhabitant on our level. Can you imagine that? There's nobody younger than him here. Weird."

C.:13

ID: 92

R.:4

"Let's visit Nnif."

ID: 94

"Let's go to the arena, Even."

Level One,  
Part Two

C.:12

ID: 118

R.:4

"Need to visit Nnif."

ID: 93  
Subtext: "Let's go to the arena, Sane. My companion says there we might find some info on how to access zerOne of the first level."  
Text: "Co-o-ol." - Sane exclaims happily. - "Actually, I've never been inside of the arena. Not really interested in going alone. Guess, I'm more of a single-player type of person. Don't mind a bit of a co-op though, but it's hard to find a party suited to my personality... No idea why."  
"I know why." - Even says, once Sane stops talking. - "I took a peek at him, well, I mean my multi-voiced unknown feature did that, to be precise. He's the youngest inhabitant on our level. Can you imagine that? There's nobody younger than him here. Weird. But that explains why he's having difficulties in finding friends and keeps pretending that he's a big chunk of muscled rock and not a young fellow."  
While Even is explaining this you arrive at the Shrike.  
"We're here." - Sane points at the arena that appears in front of you. - "Your number one place to go for a long time. Should we enter?"

ID: 94  
Subtext: "Let's go to the arena, Even. Need to finally check that loophole again."  
Text:  
"Let's just fast-travel." - Even yawns. - "Here, allow me to port you, sir."  
After the sound of snapping fingers you appear in the lockers area of the Shrike. The place where participants prepare for the Writers Fights before they start. Right now it's empty as no Fight is going on at the moment.  
"Well, well, well..." - Suddenly you hear a shrill voice. - "Look what the code's logged in!" - A very small lady is standing in front of the exit of the lockers room. A pair of big blue eyes staring at you, squinting and glowing viciously. - "I remember you... cheater!" - She spits the last word, stomping her tiny foot, making an angry thump-thump sound.  
"In case you were wondering," - Even points at the little lady. - "It's Moor Cow. Remember the gnome from the last Fight? Before you entered the shortcut. Yep, that's her. Well, to be precise, it was her arena character, so now you can see her as she looks in zerOne. And she looks very angry."  
"I saw what you did there!" - More thump-thumps accompany each word. - "Filthy cheater! Glitching your way through the textures! What are you, a speedrunner?"

ID: 118  
Subtext: "I need to visit a friend first, Sane. Can we meet at the arena in a bit?"  
Text:  
"Sure. I'll wait for you at the entrance then." Sane exits his place and you decide to go to Nnif as Una suggested.  
"I keep thinking about Sane." - Even says thoughtfully. - "Child of two worlds this one. Wondering why at his age he talks and acts like this? Try surviving in the tower all by yourself. He's not in any of the writers guilds, doesn't take part in the fights, and yet manages to stay on the second level. That's a hell of an achievement for a young man. I took a peek at him, well, I mean my multi-voiced unknown feature did that, to be precise. He's the youngest inhabitant on our level. Can you imagine that? There's nobody younger than him here. Weird."

ID: 92

"Let's go to Nnif."

ID: 95

"Let's go."

ID: 95  
Subtext: "Yeah, let me show you the wonderful world of the lockers area. I should be able to grant you access while we're in the group. We can enter the arena itself from there."  
Text: You enter the lockers area of the Shrike. The place where participants prepare for the Writers Fights before they start. Right now it's empty as no Fight is going on at the moment.  
"Well, well, well..." - Suddenly you hear a

ID: 107

"No time."

ID: 108

"I'm not a cheater."

ID: 92  
Subtext: "Let's pay Nnif a visit. Una said she might help."  
Text:  
"Our friendly owner of Dixie's shop?"  
Even raises one ear.  
"Sure, why not. She knew Deo, so maybe we'll be able to get some info on how to proceed with the first level zerOne. She's

ID: 107  
Subtext: "Listen, I don't know why you're so angry at me, but we have other things to do, so we'll just go, alright?"  
Text:  
You try to pass by the little lady, but she takes a furious step towards you.  
"You are not going anywhere!" - Two tiny

not at her shop at the moment I've just checked. So, we're going to her life-capsule."

While you head over there it continues talking.

"I guess we have Nnif to thank for my activation. Technically she did that, even though she might not fully understand what it was. Anyway," - Even points at the door in the corridor once you arrive. - "Knock-knock digitally or in that brave real world or theirs?"

**ID: 119**  
Digital shadow.

**ID: 120** Sw.  
Reality check.

**ID: 119**

**Subtext:** "I'll ping her in zerOne. No need for real world interaction."

**Text:**

You call Nnif. After a few minutes she finally replies.

"Soai? Didn't expect to see you today." - She sounds a bit surprised. - "Come in, let's talk inside."

You enter Nnif's digital apartment.

"I'm feeling some retro vibes here." - Even glances around. - "As if she's a fan of different century furniture and aesthetics. Never thought her to be much of the old times kind of person, with all the tech and gadgets in her shop." - It then looks at Nnif. - "Hm, why does she look different?"

You also notice Nnif's face. No more glowing tattoos and one side of the head shaven.

"Almost feels like her face's missing something..." - Even continues guessing.

"Stop staring at me already." - Nnif interrupts your thought process. - "I'm working on a new look, ok? Felt like I want some changes in my life, hence this." - She points at her face. - "It's a work in progress thingy and you've come just in the middle of me doing some tinkering. So, no judging, deal?" - Seeing no objections, she continues. - "What brings you here, Soai? Event Horizon issues? You've demonstrated some weird behavior during the last Writers Fight. Was it because of it?"

**ID: 121**  
"I'm a virtual boy..."

**ID: 122**  
"Need a ride to the first level."

shrill voice. - "Look what the code's logged in!" - A very small lady is standing in front of the exit of the lockers room. A pair of big blue eyes staring at you, squinting and glowing viciously. - "I remember you... cheater!" - She spits the last word, stomping her tiny foot, making an angry thump-thump sound.

"In case you were wondering," - Even points at the little lady. - "It's Moor Cow. Remember the gnome from the last Fight? Before you entered the shortcut. Yep, that's her. Well, to be precise, it was her arena character, so now you can see her as she looks in zerOne. And she looks very angry."

"I saw what you did there!" - More thump-thumps accompany each word. - "Filthy cheater! Glitching your way through the textures! What are you, a speedrunner?"

In the next moment she notices Sane who's standing behind you, and her voice suddenly changes. A beautiful soft sound, like a narrator of a cozy little adventure game. - "Oh, hi, Noru!"

"Hey, Ev!" - Sane waves to her, smiling happily.

**ID: 96**  
"What's going on?"

**ID: 96**

**Subtext:** "Erm... What's going on? Who is Noru and Ev?"

**Text:** "It's me actually." - Sane sounds a bit confused. - "I mean, Noru... Short for Noruen. My real name. You didn't think it's Sane Snacks, did you?"

"Well, I certainly didn't." - Even chuckles. - "That makes the angry lady..."

"And you didn't think my real name was Moor Cow, right?" - Shrill voice comes back again. - "I'm Ev, short for Evren. But that's beside the point, cheater!" - She looks at Sane. - "Why are you with him, Noru?"

"We are... Kinda..." - He replies apologetically. - "Well... I guess... Friends?"

"Friends?" - Two tiny arms cross over a tiny chest. - "With this cheater?" - After a couple of more thump-thumps her beautiful deep voice comes back again. - "Seriously, Noru, what's going on? One day you tell me there's nobody to talk to, then you show up with... A friend?"

"I'm taking a look at him outside zerOne," - Even starts laughing. - "Our dude is all red like a good old banwave notice. What?" - One rabbit's ear goes up. - "I see both worlds at the same time, ok? Can't do anything about it."

**ID: 97**  
"You have friends?"

**ID: 102**  
"We should go."

you are not going anywhere! - Two tiny hands placed on her tiny hips. - We're gonna settle this once and for all..."

"Hm, I don't think we can just ignore her..." - Even notices thoughtfully. - "Seems like you managed to make her really angry after the last Fight..."

Finger by finger, the little gnome slowly takes off a tiny white glove that appeared on her hand. Then she smashes it into the ground.

"We do this like real poets. You..." - A tiny forefinger stabs at you. - "Versus me. Name's Evren by the way." - A tiny thumb beats her chest. - "This is a duel!"

She makes a pause, then announces. - "We're gonna play Rock, paper, scissors, lizard, Spock! First one who gets five rounds wins."

**ID: 108**

**Subtext:** "I'm not a cheater, ok? I'm arena-rules abiding and respectful poet, lady! The fact that I've applied some clever usage of Shrike-mechanic doesn't give you the right to talk to me like that!"

**Text:**

Two big blue eyes grow bigger, staring at you from below.

"Erm, Soai..." - You hear Even's worried voice. - "I've a feeling that the little one is going to explode. Not sure if this was the right way to talk to her..."

The lady produces a hissing sound, as if a lot of steam is coming out of her. Then suddenly she calms down and starts talking in a completely different voice. A beautiful soft sound, like a narrator of a cozy little adventure game.

"Ok that was a bit too much on my side probably. But I just like role-playing, you know. Was just hanging around here, hoping for a bit of fun, but everyone's kinda gloomy. Dunno, maybe the second level is not a bright place to be. I'm sort of new here. I'm Evren. You didn't think my real name was Moor Cow, right?" - She giggles. - "Listen, I'm a bit bored, can you just play along, and I'll let you be?"

"I'm confused..." - Even's voice comes back. - "What is she..."

In the next moment Evren announces. - "We're gonna play Rock, paper, scissors, lizard, Spock! First one who gets five rounds wins."

**ID: 109**  
"Rock, paper, what?"

**ID: 110**  
"I think I'll pass."

ID: 97

**Subtext:** "I thought you don't have many friends, Sane... I mean Noru."

**Text:** "I don't." - The giant spreads his big arms. - "We've met recently... Well, I was helping Ev to settle down once she moved here, to the second level."

"Which was very kind of you." - Ev's angry voice ringing. - "But you shouldn't hang out with cheaters!"

"Listen, he's not a cheater, ok?" - Sane raises his hands peacefully. - "It's more complicated than that... I'll explain it to you later..." - He then adds, as if noticing it for the first time. - "Why is your voice changing constantly?"

"I'm role-playing, silly." - Deep pleasant sound spreads throughout the room. - "You do the same with your falling out wasteland boy, don't you?" - She points at Sane, then continues in a gnomish voice. - "And, while I'm doing my arena business, I like being a miniscule smidge of fury, ok?" - She quickly turns back to you. - "And you!" - A very little finger points at your chest. - "Cheater or not, you're dealing with me! We're gonna settle this once and for all..."

"Man, she's really into role-playing this one..." - Even notices thoughtfully. - "Either that, or you managed to make her really angry after the last Fight..."

Finger by finger, Ev slowly takes off a tiny white glove that appeared on her hand.

Then she smashes it into the ground.

"We do this like real poets. You..." - A tiny forefinger stabs at you. - "Versus me." - A tiny thumb beats her chest. - "A duel!"

Ev makes a pause, then announces. -

"We're gonna play Rock, paper, scissors, lizard, Spock! First one who gets three rounds wins. I'd go for five, but, since you're so called friend of Noru, I'll cut you some slack. Consider this a professional courtesy."

ID: 98

"Rock, paper, what?"

ID: 98

**Subtext:** "Rock, paper, what? I have no idea what you are talking about."

**Text:** Evren squints even harder than before. - "Are you serious? Don't you tell me you don't know the rules of Rock, paper, scissors, lizard, Spock!"

She then notices that you clearly don't know these rules.

"Great." - She throws up her little arms in the air. - "Fine, I'll explain. It's as easy as peasy, so listen carefully and don't make me repeat it again."

Ev raises a finger and starts explaining.

"Scissors cuts paper, paper covers rock, rock crushes lizard, lizard poisons Spock, Spock smashes scissors, scissors decapitates lizard, lizard eats paper, paper disproves Spock, Spock vaporizes rock, and as it always has, rock crushes scissors. Is everything clear now?"

ID: 102

**Subtext:** "We should go, Sane. I don't know why you're so angry at me, Ev, but we have other things to do."

**Text:** You try to pass by Evren, but she takes a furious step towards you.

"You are not going anywhere!" - Two tiny hands placed on her tiny hips. - We're gonna settle this once and for all..."

"Hm, I don't think we can just ignore her..." - Even notices thoughtfully. - "Seems like you managed to make her really angry after the last Fight..."

Finger by finger, Ev slowly takes off a tiny white glove that appeared on her hand.

Then she smashes it into the ground.

"We do this like real poets. You..." - A tiny forefinger stabs at you. - "Versus me." - A tiny thumb beats her chest. - "A duel!"

Ev makes a pause, then announces. -

"We're gonna play Rock, paper, scissors, lizard, Spock! First one who gets three rounds wins. I'd go for five, but, since you're so called friend of Noru, I'll cut you some slack. Consider this a professional courtesy."

ID: 109

**Subtext:** "Rock, paper, what? I have no idea what you are talking about."

**Text:**

"Are you serious?" - Evren squints. - "Don't you tell me you don't know the rules of Rock, paper, scissors, lizard, Spock!"

She then notices that you clearly don't know these rules.

"Great." - She throws up her little arms in the air. - "Fine, I'll explain. It's as easy as peasy, so listen carefully and don't make me repeat it again."

A tiny finger goes up like a pointer.

"Scissors cuts paper, paper covers rock, rock crushes lizard, lizard poisons Spock, Spock smashes scissors, scissors decapitates lizard, lizard eats paper, paper disproves Spock, Spock vaporizes rock, and as it always has, rock crushes scissors. Is everything clear now?"

RPS ID: 111

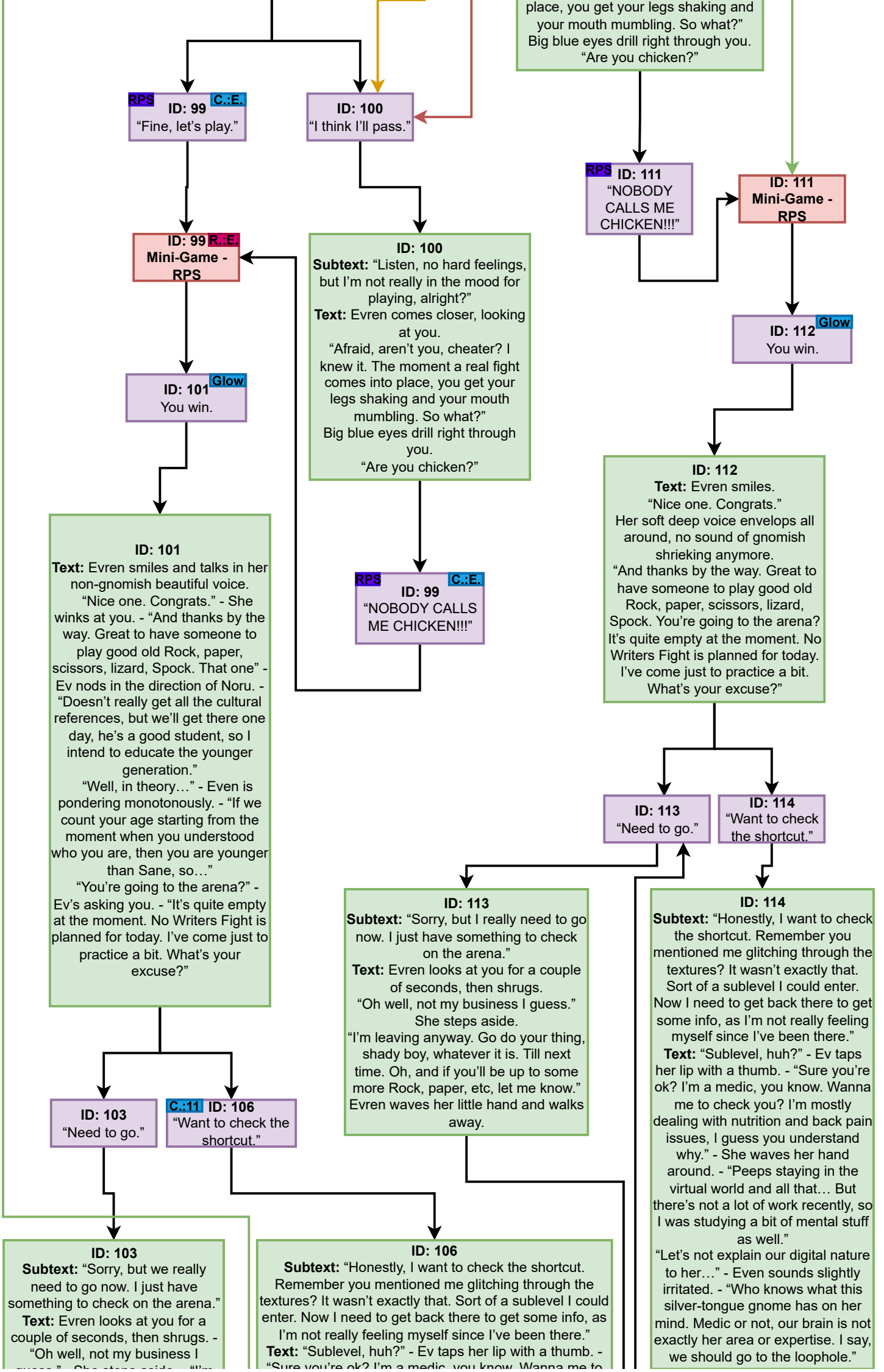
"Fine, let's play."

ID: 110

**Subtext:** "Listen, no hard feelings, but I'm not really in the mood for playing, alright?"

**Text:**

Evren comes closer, looking at you. "Afraid, aren't you, poet-boy? I knew it. The moment a real fight comes into





guess." - She steps aside. - "I'm leaving anyway. Go do your thing, shady boy, whatever it is."  
"Khm, Soai..." - Noru clears his throat nervously. - "I think I'll go with Ev, if you don't mind. Promised to show her around, you know, since she's come quite recently."  
"That'd be nice of you, big guy."  
- Ev then raises her tiny finger. - "Just stop asking me to be the voice for one of your board games, ok? I said I'll think about it later, so don't push it."  
"It's called a game-m..."  
"Hush." - Ev's finger goes higher. - "Later I said."  
"Alright..." - Noru finally concedes. - "Guess we can go now. Cheers, Soai."

**ID: 104**  
"See ya."

**ID: 104**  
**Subtext:** "See you, Noru. Have fun."  
**Text:** "Hm, what do you know... Our buddy Sane Snacks has a real name and no less real friend."  
- Even says while you look at the two of them going away. - "Weird... Something's off about that gnome lady. Can't see her in real life. Maybe cause she's moved here recently and I can't access her feed due to some updates in progress or whatever, dunno. I guess, we'll see... Or not."  
You go to the arena, listening to Even talking.  
"No fighting today, the track is almost empty, so let's just go to the so-called place where it's all begun."  
You cross the start line of the race track and reach the point where you entered the shortcut during the last Fight.  
"Voila." - You hear the sound of fingers snapping. - "One entrance for you, my restless master."  
An oval portal is glowing in front of you.

**ID: 105** **Glow**  
Enter the portal.

Sure you're ok? I'm a medic, you know. Wanna me to check you? I'm mostly dealing with nutrition and back pain issues, I guess you understand why." - She waves her hand around. - "Peeps staying in the virtual world and all that... But there's not a lot of work recently, so I was studying a bit of mental stuff as well."  
"He's not real." - Noru interrupts Evren suddenly. - "Some old poet made him as an arena character and then set him free in zerOne."  
"Great..." - Even exclaims loudly. - "Let us just tell everyone who we are. I suggest we limit our exposure to our human friends." - It sighs then. - "But nobody hears me anyway... They do it literally while you, mister Soai, seem to be ignoring my remarks."  
While you were listening to Even's whining, Noru was telling Ev about you.  
"Interesting..." - She raises a brow, observing you. - "On the other hand, can't say that's my area of expertise. I'm more of a human person, you know. Sorry for being honest, but I just see you as an advanced NPC now."  
"Welp..." - Even sounds relieved. - "Guess, the gnome lady doesn't really care about us. Either that or she doesn't fully understand what we are. Though, the same goes for us, so..."  
"Right, I won't be keeping you guys then." - Evren walks towards the exit of the lockers room. - "Will go somewhere else, it was enough arena for me for today."  
"Khm, Soai..." - Noru clears his throat nervously. - "I think I'll go with Ev, if you don't mind. Promised to show her around, you know, since she's come quite recently."  
"That'd be nice of you, big guy." - Ev then raises her tiny finger. - "Just stop asking me to be the voice for one of your board games, ok? I said I'll think about it later, so don't push it."  
"It's called a game-m..."  
"Hush." - Ev's finger goes higher. - "Later I said."  
"Alright..." - Noru finally concedes. - "Guess we can go now. Cheers, Soai."

**ID: 115**  
"I'm not really a human..."

**ID: 115**  
**Subtext:** "To be completely honest, I'm not really a human..."  
**Text:** You decide to tell Evren the truth.  
"Great..." - Even exclaims loudly. - "Let us just tell everyone who we are. I suggest we limit our exposure to our human friends." - It sighs then. - "But nobody hears me anyway... And you, mister Soai, seem to be ignoring my remarks."  
"Interesting..." - Evren raises a brow, observing you. - "On the other hand, can't say that's my area of expertise. I'm more of a human person, you know. Sorry for being honest, but I just see you as an advanced NPC now."  
"Welp..." - Even sounds relieved. - "Guess, the gnome lady doesn't really care about us. Either that or she doesn't fully understand what we are. Though, the same goes for us, so..."  
"Right, I won't be keeping you then." - Evren walks towards the exit of the lockers room. - "Will go somewhere else, it was enough arena for me for today. Till next time. Oh, and if you'll be up to some more Rock, paper, etc, let me know."  
Evren waves her little hand and walks away.

**ID: 116**  
Enter the arena.

**ID: 116**  
**Text:** "Weird..." - Even says while you look at Evren going away. - "Something's off about that gnome lady. Can't see her in real life. Maybe cause she's moved here recently and I can't access her feed due to some updates in progress or whatever, dunno. I guess, we'll see... Or not."  
You go to the arena, listening to Even talking.  
"No fighting today, the track is almost empty, so let's just go to the so-called place where it's all begun."  
You cross the start line of the race track and reach the point where you entered the shortcut during the last Fight.  
"Voila." - You hear the sound of fingers snapping. - "One entrance for you, my restless master."  
An oval portal is glowing in front of you.

**ID: 130**  
**Subtext:** "Except for me, you are the only one being able to talk to Even, yet you don't want to do it?"  
**Text:** "Nah, dude. That's your task and burden."  
Nnif waves her hand at you.  
"If Deo made you and EH in such a way, it means he wanted you two to deal with each other yourselves. I'm not about to intervene. Besides, I don't specialize in cheats and exploits. Dancing on the thin red line, but not crossing it. Meaning, if others don't see and hear it, I'm not

**ID: 120**



**ID: 129**  
**Subtext:** "Always wanted to meet Nnif in real life. How about a little surprise for her?"  
**Text:** "Well, I am here to obey." - Even says. - "Though, we might want to call her first."  
You call Nnif. After a few minutes she finally replies.  
"Soai? Didn't expect to see you today." - She sounds tired and you barely recognize her voice. - "Why are you calling me outside zerOne?"  
"Wow, she looks..." - Even pauses, searching for a proper word, observing her pale face and dark circles around her eyes. - "Different. Like for real different. Older and like she doesn't sleep at all... Have to admit though, life-capsule kinda matches her style."  
"I'd really prefer a virtual talk." - Nnif says with a long sigh.  
"There's some explanation needed." - Even notices. - "So it's your time to shine. Gonna reveal our little secret?"

**ID: 127**  
"I'm not quite real."

**ID: 128** **Opt.**  
"Is everything alright?"

**ID: 128**  
**Subtext:** "Are you ok, Nnif? Everything's good? You're..."  
**Text:** "Old? Tired?"  
Nnif rubs her eyes slowly.  
"Yes, Soai, everything is peachy... Can't you see?" - After another sigh she adds quietly. - "Just not the best day, ok? Nevermind, reality is not the place I want to stay for long, that's it. Don't feel myself here, or rather, feel it too much. A constant reminder of my state..."  
Looks like she wants to add something else, but then glances at you.  
"You know, it's not really an example of good manners to keep using your avatar while you're calling me in real. Care to show up?"

**ID: 127**  
**Subtext:** "Nnif, there's something you should know..."  
**Text:** You tell Nnif your story and all its details. Once you finish, she looks at you silently for a moment.  
"So, the old man did manage to make you in the end."  
She looks away for a moment, thinking about something, then taps her temple.  
"Let's switch to zerOne, Soai, I want to take a look at you there and not staring at the screen here. Besides, I'm getting really annoyed by reality, so please don't make me any angrier."

**ID: 129** **Sw.**  
zerOne: true

**ID: 129**  
**Text:** You enter Nnif's digital apartment.  
"I'm feeling some retro vibes here." - Even glances around. - "As if she's a fan of different century furniture and aesthetics. Never thought her to be much of the old times kind of person, with all the tech and gadgets in her shop." - It then looks at Nnif. - "Well, at least she's exactly the same as we used to see her. Our friendly gadgets vendor in all her goggling glory."  
"Shut up, rabbit."  
There is a pause during which Even stares at Nnif with its mouth open.  
"She can..."  
"Yes, I can hear you." - Nnif replies irritably. - "I'm scanning you now, Soai, and can see this Even part of you. Also, it was me who installed it, so, yeah, with a bit of tweaking, I can hear what it says as well."  
"We need to..." - Even's voice gets cut off.  
"We don't. I've muted it for now. Can't turn it off completely, as it's a part of you now. Deo didn't tell me much, to be honest. Looked like he was in a rush. He just gave me the module with EH and said that I should install it once someone comes and mentions his name. Couldn't really check it in its turned off state and I didn't want to test it on me, but now as it's active and you, well, being you, I can dive a little bit deeper." - She notices Even's panicking gestures. - "No, I can't make you be heard by others, you are part of Soai's digital brain, so you have to deal with him in that regard. The only reason I can see and hear you is that Deo gave me admin access to the module for installing it. And I can't transfer it to anyone else." - After a silent sigh from Even's side, she continues. - "As for you, Soai, my zerOne friend, I'd say I expected something like this coming from Deo. Old man kept talking about creating artificial life and all. What are you going to do now?"

**C.:14 ID: 130** **Opt.**  
"You don't want to talk to Even?"

**ID: 131**  
"Need a ride to the first level."

**ID: 121**  
**Subtext:** "Well, sort of... It turned out that EH is now a part of me. On top of that I'm a former arena character..."  
**Text:** You tell Nnif your story and all its details. Once you finish, she looks at you silently for a moment.  
"Huh."  
"Huh?" - Even stares back at her. - "That's it? Her reaction is just 'huh'? I expected..."  
"Shut up, rabbit."  
There is a pause during which Even stares at Nnif with its mouth open.  
"She can..."

**ID: 122**  
**Subtext:** "Listen, Nnif, I need to go to the first level. Want to check something there."  
**Text:** "What?"  
Nnif stares at you, brows flying up.  
"Wait a sec." - She gets silent and her lenses start glowing. - "Huh..."  
"Soai I think she's..." - Even's voice gets cut off.  
"Thought I wouldn't see it, sneaky AI-boy?" - Nnif chuckles. - "I've admin access to Event Horizon, you know? Was me who installed it after all. So, based on your logs you're Deo's little side project. Can't say I'm

**ID: 131**  
**Subtext:** "Well, I kinda need to go to the first level. Deo spent his final hours there, so maybe I'll find something or get the idea of where to go next."  
**Text:** "Hm-m..."  
Nnif taps her lip with her finger.  
"If you were real, I'd just tell you to forget such a wonderful idea and keep doing your usual routine stuff. But you're somewhat not real, so it seems like no harm in telling you that you can take a virtual peek at

that." She raises a brow.  
"So, getting back to my question. What are you going to do now?"

"Yes, I can hear you." - Nnif replies irritatedly. - "I'm scanning you now, Soai, and can see this Even part of you. Also, it was me who installed it, so, yeah, with a bit of tweaking, I can hear what it says as well." "We need to..." - Even's voice gets cut off. "We don't. I've muted it for now. Can't turn it off completely, as you said it's a part of you now. Deo didn't tell me much, to be honest. Looked like he was in a rush. He just gave me the module with EH and said that I should install it once someone comes and mentions his name. Couldn't really check it in its turned off state and I didn't want to test it on me, but now as it's active and you, well, being you, I can dive a little bit deeper." - She notices Even's panicking gestures. - "No, I can't make you be heard by others, you are part of Soai's digital brain, so you have to deal with him in that regard. The only reason I can see and hear you is that Deo gave me admin access to the module for installing it. And I can't transfer it to anyone else." - After a silent sigh from Even's side, she continues. - "As for you, Soai, my zerOne friend, I'd say I expected something like this coming from Deo. Old man kept talking about creating artificial life and all. What are you going to do now?"

Deo didn't tell me much, to be honest. Looked like he was in a rush. He just gave me the module with EH and said that I should install it once someone comes and mentions his name. Couldn't really check it in its turned off state and I didn't want to test it on me, but now as it's active and you, well, being you, I can dive a little bit deeper." - She glances at Even. - "No, I can't make you be heard by others, you are part of Soai's digital brain, so you have to deal with him in that regard. The only reason I can see and hear you is that Deo gave me admin access to the module for installing it. And I can't transfer it to anyone else." - After a silent sigh from Even's side, she continues. - "As for you, Soai, my zerOne friend, I'd say I expected something like this coming from Deo. Old man kept talking about creating artificial life and all. Whatever." - She waves it off and looks at you. - "So, you were saying..."

other levels, or even visit them." She glances at Even. "Yeah, yeah, I see your functionality to access cameras and that you can't check zerOne on other levels yet." - She lowers her voice. - "There's a system of portals hidden beneath the Shrike arena. I've a feeling you've been near it once you talked with Deo and your rabbit was activated. You can go back there and use them. It's not rocket science, but may take some time to get the right sequence of them. However, I can make your life a little bit easier. Here." - She shows you a strange looking square-shaped device with a knob on it. It's a Volumetric Portals Navigator. With it we can check today's sequence." Nnif starts turning the knob and you hear clicking sounds produced by the device. In a moment it gets louder and the knob turns red. "Ok, this is your first portal, got it?" Seeing you nodding, she continues turning the knob, and in a few seconds, it turns green. "Second portal." - Nnif whispers as if some ritual is happening. Barely moving and making any sounds, all three of you keep staring at the square device and Nnif starts turning the knob once again. After a bit of clicking and glowing the knob becomes blue. "Here's the third one. There are usually four portals. We need one more." - Nnif touches the knob, but it doesn't turn. - "Ah, yeah, I forgot. They've changed their payment model recently and I haven't yet paid for the current month subscription, so we can only use it three times per day. Sorry, Soai, but you have to figure out the last portal on your own."

**C.:14 ID: 123 Opt:**  
"You don't want to talk to Even?"

**ID: 124**  
"Need a ride to the first level."

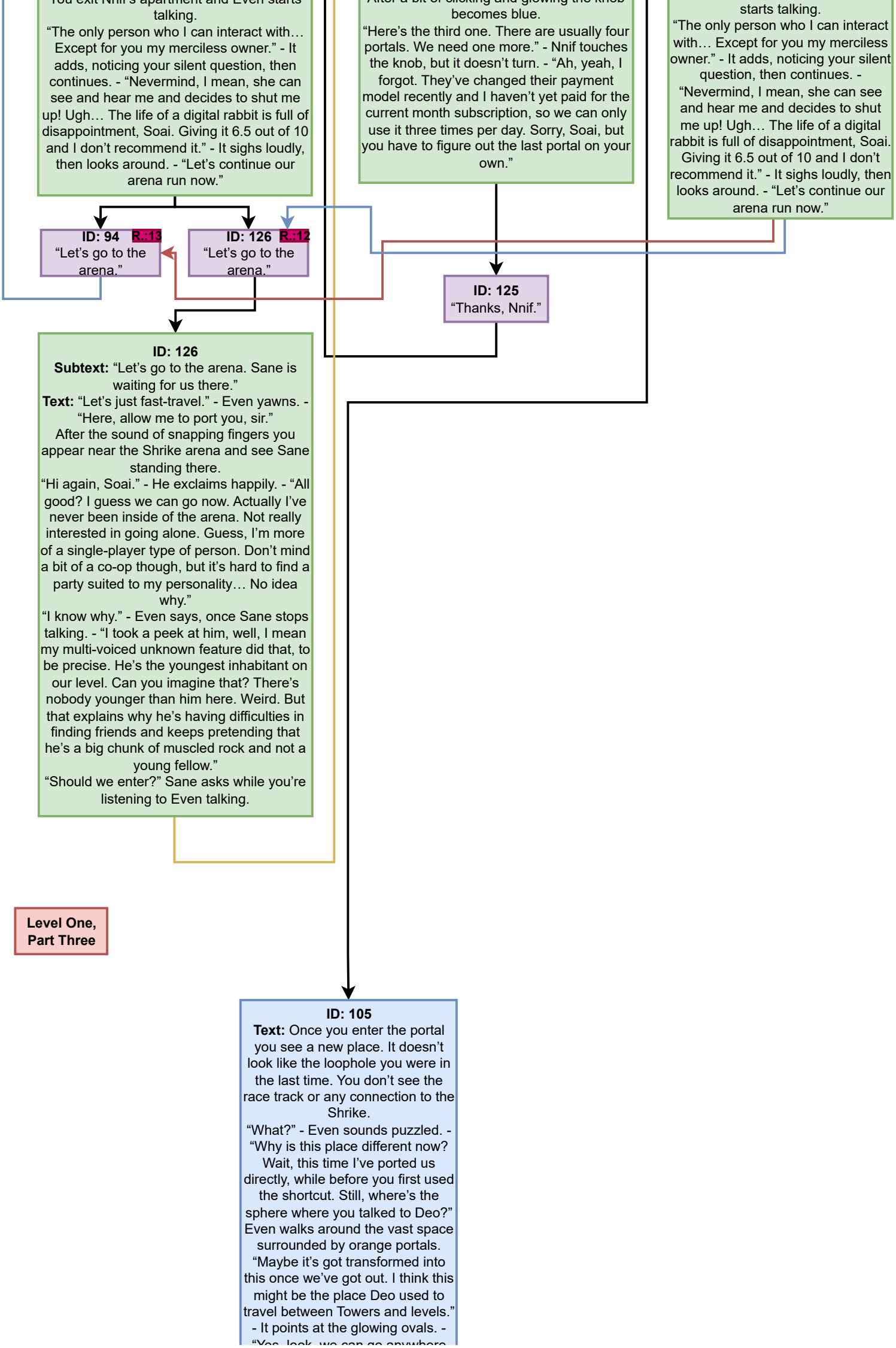
**ID: 123**  
**Subtext:** "Except for me, you are the only one being able to talk to Even, yet you don't want to do it?"  
**Text:** "Nah, dude. That's your task and burden."  
Nnif waves her hand at you.  
"If Deo made you and EH in such a way, it means he wanted you two to deal with each other yourselves. I'm not about to intervene. Besides, I don't specialize in cheats and exploits. Dancing on the thin red line, but not crossing it. Meaning, if others don't see and hear it, I'm not supposed to do that as well. That's that."  
She raises a brow.  
"So, getting back to my question. What are you going to do now?"

**ID: 124**  
**Subtext:** "Well, I kinda need to go to the first level. Deo spent his final hours there, so maybe I'll find something or get the idea of where to go next."  
**Text:** "Hm-m..."  
Nnif taps her lip with her finger.  
"If you were real, I'd just tell you to forget such a wonderful idea and keep doing your usual routine stuff. But you're somewhat not real, so it seems like no harm in telling you that you can take a virtual peek at other levels, or even visit them."  
She glances at Even.  
"Yeah, yeah, I see your functionality to access cameras and that you can't check zerOne on other levels yet." - She lowers her voice. - "There's a system of portals hidden beneath the Shrike arena. I've a feeling you've been near it once you talked with Deo and your rabbit was activated. You can go back there and use them. It's not rocket science, but may take some time to get the right sequence of them. However, I can make your life a little bit easier. Here." - She shows you a strange looking square-shaped device with a knob on it. It's a Volumetric Portals Navigator. With it we can check today's sequence."  
Nnif starts turning the knob and you hear clicking sounds produced by the device. In a moment it gets louder and the knob turns red.  
"Ok, this is your first portal, got it?" Seeing you nodding, she continues turning the knob, and in a few seconds, it turns green.  
"Second portal." - Nnif whispers as if some ritual is happening. Barely moving and making any sounds, all three of you keep staring at the square device and Nnif starts turning the knob once again.  
After a bit of clicking and glowing the knob

**ID: 132**  
"Thanks, Nnif."

**ID: 125**  
**Subtext:** "No worries. We'll figure it out somehow. Thanks for the help Nnif, really appreciate it."  
**Text:** "Go get dem portals, wandering spirit."  
Nnif smiles.  
"Was nice meeting you, Soai. The real virtual you I mean. Even can talk again by the way." - She adds in the end.  
"Can but doesn't really want to." - It replies in a grumpy voice.  
Nnif shrugs indifferently.  
"Anywho... Good luck to you both. Now, kindly leave me be as my makeup session needs to be resumed. Till next time, Soai." You exit Nnif's apartment and Even starts

**ID: 132**  
**Subtext:** "No worries. We'll figure it out somehow. Thanks for the help Nnif, really appreciate it."  
**Text:** "Go get dem portals, wandering spirit."  
Nnif smiles.  
"Was nice meeting you, Soai. The real virtual you I mean. Even can talk again by the way." - She adds in the end.  
"Can but doesn't really want to." - It replies in a grumpy voice.  
Nnif shrugs indifferently.  
"Anywho... Good luck to you both. Now, kindly leave me be. I was tinkering with my new digital look and intend to continue it now. Till next time, Soai." You exit Nnif's apartment and Even



res, look, we can go anywhere now. Well, anywhere in zerOne I guess."

**ID: 117**  
"Sure this is a good idea?"

**ID: 117**  
**Subtext:** "Are you sure this is a good idea? We don't really know where these portals lead."  
**Text:** "Can't argue with that." Even keeps walking around the portals, studying them closely. "Sadly, my inner knowledge base is silent and doesn't provide any useful data. So, I'm kinda lacking info on the topic. But I also don't see any better ideas on how we can get to the first level. We need to find Deo's place after all. And it's down below. One of the portals should take us there."

**Portals**  
**ID: 133**  
Approach the portals.

**ID: 133**  
**Mini-Game - Portals**

**ID: 134**  
"Now wait a second."

**ID: 134**  
**Subtext:** "Wait a second... What was that? Some poetry after entering the last portal."  
**Text:** "What?" - Even raises one rabbit's ear upwards. - "I haven't noticed anything..." It waves it off. "I'm glad to inform you that now we're thinking with portals, Soai." It then looks around. "Seems like there's our passage. Final portal to the first level. I can feel it. I guess we can now say adieu to our home level and go explore the tower further down. Perhaps we can find some

answers... Or not. But something tells me this is going to be a whole different story one day.”  
Even bows theatrically and stretches its hand, showing you the glowing portal in the distance.

**ID: 135**  
To be continued...

**ID: 135**  
**Text:** Thank you for playing/reading through my text-adventure and spending your precious time with it.  
The story might continue one day, but for now some polishing is needed and, as it's started to get too long, I've decided to end the current chapter here.  
Of course, you can try replaying. Perhaps there are some different choices along the way, who knows. Or maybe some additions will appear in the future.  
In any case, thank you once again. If you're reading this, I'm really grateful that you've reached this point.  
Regardless of who or where you are I hope you're having a good (or at least more or less fine) time.

**ID: 0**  
Play again.

**Game restart.**