

Gina Øster

Fractal

Bridge to the other side



PROLOGUE

I can see them clearly now in their white coats, they are busy connecting machines to my body. After the extreme cold I have slipped out again. I'm suspended just below the ceiling. The EEG on the heart monitor shows a flat line, the blood is collected, the procedure is in full progress. Isabela is nervous, I try to reach her but she does not notice.

I look in the laboratory; 3 people apparently dead under induced hypothermia, cooled down in specially insulated thermos bags to a temperature of just above freezing point. How many of us will return this time?

Suddenly I am drawn into a tunnel. Flashes of light pass me by, it is going faster and faster, it is breathtaking. As quickly as the tunnel starts so abruptly does it end. Then there is silence. A sensation of pure bliss and ecstasy takes hold of me. I am standing on the edge of a huge vortex. It is turning from the outside inwards like some kind of a spiral with an ever-higher speed. I am floating and yet I am not. This is the last stop. Freedom.

Slowly I start to move in the same rhythm as the vortex. A bright white light in the middle indicates two directions. One goes my way, the other to the unknown. There is no notion of time; I am as light as a feather. I am, but then differently. Bodyless, as free as a bird. A sense of immense peace enters my body. The white light is approaching, pure energy. White heavenly rays, so welcoming.

*I see other appearances like myself. All on their way to the unknown.
Some are being sent back, others continue their way. Strings are being
tightened or let go*

New York Times - 4 September 2036

Tomorrow, the representatives of the International Court of Ethics will come together at the Headquarters of the United Nations in New York, to evaluate the much-discussed ethical issue of the 'AfterLife Project'. The founders of the project, four of the world's greatest scientists, will be interrogated here in the next few days.

The 'AfterLife Project' (abbreviated ALP) was established by the company SITCO in 2030, with the aim of finding an answer to the question as to whether there is life after death. A team of scientists, physicians and specialists in the phenomenon of near-death experience have been working together since the launch of the project, and have finally found a way to make the journey to the hereafter. Their method consists of people experiencing a near-death experience by going near or even beyond the frontier of death and then returning to this earthly life.

The project is controversial. The candidates are placed in a laboratory under induced hypothermia. Their blood is replaced with a cold saline solution so that the temperature of their body decreases. This method was called 'suspended animation' at the beginning of this century. At the time, it was applied to a

very small number of patients who had suffered a cardiac arrest due to a severe trauma with a major loss of blood.

If body cells are cooled down they require less oxygen. Brain tissues that can normally only survive for a few minutes without oxygen will remain intact longer this way. This gives the surgeon more time to treat the trauma before the patient is warmed up again.

At the ALP, about a quarter of the candidates are healthy, the others are terminally ill or suffering from psychological problems such as depression or anxiety disorders. They end up in a life-threatening situation this way.

When scientists first applied this method to pigs just after the turn of the century, they maintained hypothermia of 10° C for a few seconds, followed by immediate warming up of the body. In the test phase on people that followed, the same temperature of 10° C was maintained but for a slightly longer time. The candidates were connected to a heart-lung machine immediately after cooling down so that the brain would quickly be supplied with oxygen. According to the statistics, this method was applied at the time to a total of 162 patients, more than half of whom died...

The ALP started with hypothermia of 10° C. At a later stage, they dropped the temperature to just above freezing point. The controversy is that they keep the candidates in this condition for an increasingly longer period of time before they connect them to the heart-lung machine. This means a rising risk of complications, possibly leading to death.

But that is not all. The ALP wants to go even further, by cooling down the bodies in an even more radical way. They want to use a method called 'brain vitrification', in which brain tissues are cooled down to -124° C. According to various sources there is a considerable danger of brain injury or even of never waking up again...

To obtain a statistically plausible result for their research, the ALP requires a great many candidates. The number of people who have participated since the start of the actual survey in June last year is over 2,700. According to our sources, more than 400 died. Although this concerns people who volunteered, it does raise the question: is this ethically acceptable?

Thanks to social media, the ALP has now hundreds of thousands of followers worldwide. In the last quarter, it even raised an additional 6.3 billion dollars for its research. The remarkable results and the expected imminent breakthrough have even led to a waiting list of volunteers to participate in the programme.

However, the project also meets with fierce opposition, especially from religious communities. It is through them in particular, through the spiritual leaders of the International Christian Society and of the Roman Catholic Church, that this case has been presented to the Court of Ethics with the question as to whether this kind of research is permitted in our society or if it should be prohibited.

The International Court of Ethics of the United Nations was established in 2025 after the worldwide scandal regarding failed nanochip implants in demented elderly people. It has dealt with some major issues over the past few years, such as the SpaceOne affair, the company that in 2030, after several unsuccessful attempts, finally managed to put the first human being on planet Mars.

The Council consists of five judges, chosen by the joint Member States. It is chaired by Antoni Riberi from Switzerland, and will ultimately decide whether the ALP should stop their research or if they can go ahead.

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5 September 2036

New York - International Court of Ethics
Court hearing of the AfterLife Project

Members of the Board :

1. Chairman Prof. Antoni Riberi – Switzerland
2. Prof Yannis Cohn – United States
3. Prof Rosa Bernstein – Germany
4. Prof Hanna Linstrøm – Denmark
5. Prof Jon Bennett – United Kingdom

Defendants:

1. Prof Jack Brigance – Scientist at SITCO (Scientific Institute of Technology of Colorado), United States
2. Prof Robert Greene – Cardiologist and Traumatologist at the University General Hospital in Boston, United States
3. Prof Kurt Susskind – Scientist at SITCO (Scientific Institute of Technology of Colorado), United States
4. Prof Léon Tautou – Neurologist and Philosopher at the Centre Hospitalier Universitaire in Lausanne, Switzerland

Transcription - Morning of Day 1

Speakers: Antoni Riberi – Chairman of the Board
Jack Brigance – Defendant

A. Riberi: ‘Ladies and gentlemen, as President of the International Court of Ethics, I would like to welcome you to this closed hearing. At the end of this hearing, the Board will decide whether the AfterLife Project, from now on abbreviated to ALP, must be prohibited, and if those present should be prosecuted, or if the project may continue. During this hearing, all judges will be able to question the defendants.’

‘We obviously ask all who are present in this room for total discretion; there should not be any contact with the press until after the verdict.’

‘Mr Brigance, since you are the director of the ALP, we will start with you. Please explain why you and your colleagues decided to start this project.’

J. Brigance: ‘Dear members of the Board, the answer to this question is threefold.’

‘Firstly, everyone has sometimes wondered if there is life after death. What happens when we die? Most of us would like to know if there is some sort of life after death, and if so, what it looks like. Every religious movement has its own ideas but nobody knows if there is actually something.’

‘There has been some great technological progress in the scientific and medical world in the past decades. We have

learned a great deal about the origin of the universe, about black holes, about atoms and the even smaller elementary particles; but also about the human body, about brain diseases and about the near-death experience.'

'Scientists, medical specialists, philosophers and specialists in near-death experience are often only focused on their own fields. By combining their knowledge, we have created the possibility of looking further and deeper. We have now come to the point where it is possible to send the first person to the afterlife and let them return back safely to earth.'

'Secondly, an answer to the question as to whether there is life after death could take away the fear that is felt by many of us. How many people are afraid of death and live their entire lives in fear? Many religions hold their communities together by preaching about the hereafter, about heaven and hell, about the penance that needs to be done if strict rules are not followed here on earth. If we have a clear picture of what comes after death, life on earth will be lived with less anxiety and more happiness.'

'And thirdly, this might create the possibility of placing all religions under one name, a universal religion as it were. After all, people will then know what is coming, where we are going, whether there is a God or not. Most wars are caused by religious beliefs. If we gain more certainty about what happens after death, there are likely to be fewer religious conflicts, and ultimately therefore fewer wars.'

A. Riberi: 'Mr Brigance, I think that we would all be happy to live a life without fear and to find more peace on earth. You sketch a beautiful but rather idealistic utopia here.'

'Before going any further I would like to remind you and your colleagues that we are here to judge the way in which you seek answers to the question of whether there is life after death, and not the fact that you are looking for answers. This is contrary to the rumours on social media that we have already come to a verdict under pressure from various religious communities.'

J. Brigance: 'Sir, we will give you a full explanation of our research. We will show you that the benefits by far outweigh the risks and that promising results have already been achieved.'

A. Riberi: 'Very well, Mr Brigance, please proceed.'

J. Brigance: 'Your Honour, we will start by giving you an overview of what has happened in our respective disciplines during the past few decades. My colleague Kurt Susskind and I will give you a detailed outline on physics, followed by our colleague Léon Tautou, who will give you information on near-death experiences. After this, we will collate all this information and, together with our colleague Robert Greene, we will give you a deep insight into our research.'

A. Riberi: 'You have the floor, Mr Brigance, go ahead.'