

ARCHIVE FEED_03.17
STATUS: UNSTABLE

WORLD COLLAPSE

stickman



SUBJECT PRESENT AFTER EVENT

CONFIDENCE: 99.87%
LOG CONTINUITY: VERIFIED

THE ARCHIVE CYCLE

TIME AND
REALITY

CONSTANT #1

BOOK THREE OF FOUR

Worlds change. The constant remains.

ARCHIVE RECORD / III

THE ARCHIVE CYCLE

CONSTANT #1

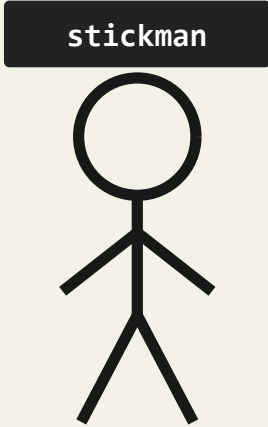
BOOK THREE OF FOUR

“Worlds change. The constant remains.”

ILLUSTRATED ARCHIVE EDITION

Basya Entertainment

KNOWN ENTITIES



STICKMAN / UNIVERSAL CONSTANT #1

A thin black body. An empty circular head. No face, clothing, or visible possessions. The nametag persists in every reality.

ONE WORLD / ONE OBJECT / MINIMUM NONZERO PROOF



PROLOGUE

SUBJECT PRESENT AFTER EVENT

The test began with a world that had already happened.

There was a city.

Then there was not.

There was a river.

Then there was not.

There was a sky full of low gray clouds.

Then there was white.

At the center of the white stood Stickman.

Thin black body.

Empty circular head.

Nametag:

stickman

A line of text appeared beneath him as if reality itself had become a terminal.

WORLD COLLAPSE – SUBJECT PRESENT AFTER EVENT

The world returned.

Different city.

Different river.

Different sky.

Stickman remained in the same position.

A second line:

SPATIAL RESET – SUBJECT PRESENT AFTER EVENT

The city vanished again.

This time the nametag disappeared first.

For less than a second, there was no label above Stickman.

Then it returned.

stickman

NAMETAG REMOVAL – FAILED

Another reset.

Stickman stood in darkness.

Another line:

IDENTITY REMOVAL – FAILED

The test continued.

Nobody asked Stickman for permission.

Nobody appeared to administer it.

Nobody explained why the world kept ending around him.

When it was over, a classification printed itself into an Archive record.

UNIVERSAL CONSTANT #1

The record was dated long before Stickman remembered any of it.

NEXT TEST: PENDING

Stickman found the message exactly where Book Two had left it.

The terminal near the tungsten cube.

NEXT TEST: PENDING

He stared at the word test.

The Archive had shown him old classification records before.

WORLD COLLAPSE.

TIMELINE REVISION.

IDENTITY REMOVAL.

He had assumed those events belonged to a past he could not remember.

Now the Archive suggested another test was coming.

Stickman typed:

CANCEL TEST

NO ACTIVE USER AUTHORITY

He typed:

WHO STARTED TEST

NO ACTIVE USER AUTHORITY

He typed:

WHY TEST

CLASSIFICATION MAINTENANCE

That was almost an answer.

He tried again.

CLASSIFICATION BY WHO

ACCESS RESTRICTED

The screen went dark.

The tungsten cube reflected him.

For one frame, its polished surface showed not one Stickman but dozens.

Each standing in a different world.

Each with the same nametag.

Then the reflection became normal.

Stickman decided not to wait for the test.

He left.

The Archive followed him anyway.

Not physically.

But in little signs.

A store receipt listed:

CUSTOMER: STICKMAN

STATUS: PRESENT

A bus route map briefly showed:

EDGE ACCESS: VERIFIED

A menu in a restaurant contained one item:

CONSTANT

Nobody else noticed.

By sunset, Stickman crossed an Edge into a city where every person forgot him once per minute.

That was where the next test began.



THE CITY THAT FORGOT HIM

“Hello,” said the woman at the front desk.

Stickman waved.

“Can I help you?”

He pointed at a map.

She gave directions.

Exactly sixty seconds later, she looked up.

“Oh. Hello.”

Stickman stood in the same place.

She did not remember him.

The whole city behaved that way.

A shopkeeper sold Stickman a sandwich, turned around, turned back, and attempted to sell him the same sandwich.

A police officer asked why Stickman was standing in the street, forgot the question halfway through, then asked again.

Children drew his outline in chalk and forgot why before finishing.

Only the nametag persisted in their attention.

People did not remember Stickman, but they could read:

stickman

Every minute, identity reset.

Every minute, the city accepted him again as if he had just arrived.

Stickman tested objects.

He wrote his name on paper.

The paper became blank after sixty seconds.

He scratched a line into a wall.

Gone.

He placed a stone on a table.

The stone returned to the ground where it had been before he moved it.

Then he took a coin from his invisible pocket.

The coin remained.

It had crossed worlds with him.

At 03:14 local time, every citizen stopped.

Not froze.

Paused.

They turned toward Stickman simultaneously.

A sentence appeared above the city skyline.

IDENTITY RESET – SUBJECT PRESENT

Then everyone resumed.

Nobody remembered looking at him.

Stickman crossed the nearest Edge.

The Archive shelf for the city already held an object.

A blank name badge.

COLLECTOR: STICKMAN

DATE OF ENTRY: 117 YEARS AGO

Stickman had never been there before.

At least not that he remembered.



THE WORLD THAT COULD NOT PHOTOGRAPH HIM

Cameras worked normally in World 12,882.

They photographed buildings.

Clouds.

People.

Animals.

Even things that were invisible to the naked eye.

They could not photograph Stickman.

A photographer discovered this by accident.

She took a picture of a crowded square.

Stickman stood near the fountain.

In the photograph, the fountain was visible.

The crowd was visible.

There was a Stickman-shaped absence between them.

Not white.

Not black.

Just missing image information.

His nametag remained.

stickman

Floating above an empty gap.

The photographer stared.

“Again.”

She took another.

Same result.

They tried film.

Digital.

Instant cameras.

A security system.

A machine that photographed four seconds into the future.

No Stickman.

Nametag every time.

Then the photographer used an antique camera with a cracked lens.

The image developed.

Stickman appeared.

But the nametag read:

candidate 01

Stickman froze.

The photographer looked at the print.

“What does candidate mean?”

He took it.

The text changed in his hand.

stickman

She blinked.

“It always said that.”

Stickman knew it had not.

They photographed him beside a mirror.

The mirror image appeared in the photo.

Stickman himself did not.

They photographed only his shadow.

The shadow appeared.

They photographed the nametag.

It appeared.

Something about Stickman's physical presence resisted local recording while references to him did not.

At 03:14, every camera in the studio fired simultaneously.

Hundreds of flashes.

A terminal-like message appeared on every resulting image.

LOCAL REPRESENTATION FAILURE
EXTERNAL REFERENCE MAINTAINED
TEST RESULT: PERSISTENT

The photographer read the words.

Then every photograph became blank.

She forgot the test.

Stickman did not.

He carried one undeveloped film roll to the Archive.

The Archive accepted it.

OBJECT: FILM
TEST ENVIRONMENT: PASSIVE
RESULT: STABLE

Stickman stared at PASSIVE.

Not every test had been built as a chamber.

Some were ordinary worlds where the right failure simply happened.

The system watched.



THE PLANET OF MIRRORS

The mirror planet contained no reflective glass.
Everything reflected anyway.
Mountains reflected the sky.
Roads reflected people.
People reflected houses.
The sky reflected something nobody could see directly.
Stickman walked across a silver plain.
His reflection followed beneath him.
Same thin body.
Same empty head.
Same nametag.

stickman

Then the reflection stopped.
Stickman continued.
The reflected Stickman remained behind.
It looked upward.
Then raised one hand.
Stickman did not.
The mirror image touched its nametag.
The text changed.

subject

Then:

candidate

Then:

01

Stickman returned and crouched over the reflection.

The reflected figure pointed beneath itself.

Far deeper in the silver surface, Archive shelves appeared.

A terminal floated among them.

TEST ENVIRONMENT 44

The mirror cracked.

Stickman stepped away.

The planet repaired itself instantly.

A local traveler approached.

“You saw the downstairs?”

Stickman pointed.

“Sometimes mirrors remember versions that didn’t happen.”

Stickman pointed at himself.

The traveler shrugged.

“Maybe you happened more than once.”

Stickman chose a small shard of silver stone as the Archive object.

The Archive rejected it.

Its shelf already contained an identical shard.

DATE OF ENTRY: BEFORE CLASSIFICATION

Stickman stared at the phrase.

Before classification was not a date.

The label corrected itself.

DATE: UNRESOLVED

Then went blank.



PREVIOUS DID NOT TEST HIM

Stickman searched Previous's notes for the word test.

He found seventeen references.

Most were not about him.

LOCK TEST 4.

EDGE TEST 19.

ARCHIVE STORAGE TEST.

Then:

CONSTANT TEST OBSERVED

Stickman stopped.

The note was brief.

I DID NOT INITIATE THIS.

Second line:

SUBJECT NOT YET PRESENT IN ARCHIVE.

Third:

THE SYSTEM IS RECORDING HIM ANYWAY.

Stickman read it several times.

Previous had seen his tests.

Previous had not caused them.

A later note:

Test sequence appears whenever major world revision intersects subject.

No administrator observed.

Another:

I attempted to interrupt one.

Result: test continued without Archive terminal access.

Another:

I do not know what is doing the classifying.

Then, underlined:

THE ARCHIVE MAY ONLY BE DISPLAYING THE RESULT.

Stickman sat on the floor.

That removed one suspect.

It did not add an answer.

He kept searching.

Previous had made a list of test events.

WORLD COLLAPSE.

SPATIAL RESET.

TIMELINE REVISION.

IDENTITY REMOVAL.

NAMETAG REMOVAL.

VOID CONTACT.

Beside the last:

INCONCLUSIVE.

Underneath:

I hope it remains that way.

Stickman looked down the corridor.

A faint pencil-scratch sound came from somewhere beyond the lost shelves.

The Void.

He closed the notebook.



A WORLD WITH NO YESTERDAY

The town woke every morning without a past.

Not amnesia.

The past genuinely ceased to exist.

At midnight, photographs became blank.

Graves lost names.

Buildings became newly built.

People retained personalities but no memories older than sunrise.

They had adapted.

Everyone kept notebooks.

Every notebook began:

IF YOU ARE READING THIS, YOU ARE YOU.

Stickman liked the practicality.

A teacher gave him a notebook.

“You’ll want one.”

Stickman wrote:

I AM STICKMAN.

At midnight, the town changed.

Road cracks vanished.

Trees became younger.

People woke confused and immediately reached for their notebooks.

Stickman's notebook remained unchanged.

So did Stickman.

A message appeared across the first page beneath his writing.

TIMELINE REVISION – SUBJECT PRESENT AFTER EVENT

Stickman did not write it.

He tore out the page.

The page regenerated.

He burned it.

The notebook returned to his hand.

The teacher found him outside.

“You okay?”

Stickman showed her the line.

She read it.

“Was that there yesterday?”

Stickman pointed at her notebook.

She laughed.

“Bad question here.”

At the center of town stood a clocktower.

At 03:14, it chimed thirteen times.

The entire world rewound one day.

Stickman watched buildings unbuild.

People walk backward.

Rain rise.

The teacher become someone who had not met him.

Stickman remained facing forward.

At the end of the rewind, the sky displayed:

TIMELINE REVISION – VERIFIED

The message vanished.

Stickman left.

He brought the notebook to the Archive.

The shelf accepted it.

OBJECT: NOTEBOOK

STATUS: ACTIVE

TEST RESULT: STABLE

Stickman tore the TEST RESULT label off.

It grew back.



THE DAY HIS NAMETAG LIED

Stickman's nametag had never lied.

It could not be removed.

It could not be painted over.

It appeared in photographs.

People understood it without knowing the language.

Then one morning it said:

not stickman

Stickman stopped walking.

The letters remained.

not stickman

Nobody around him reacted.

A woman selling fruit waved.

"Morning, Stickman."

He pointed upward.

She read the label.

"Yeah. Stickman."

He looked again.

not stickman

The world saw one thing.

He saw another.

Stickman crossed an Edge.

New world.

Same label.

not stickman

Archive.

Same.

A terminal identified him:

```
STICKMAN  
UNIVERSAL CONSTANT #1  
STATUS: PRESENT
```

He pointed at his nametag.

The terminal responded:

```
DISPLAY MISMATCH  
IDENTITY UNAFFECTED
```

That was unsettling in a very precise way.

The name above him was not his identity.

It was an interface.

If the interface lied and reality still knew who he was, then something deeper maintained the association.

At 03:14, the text changed again.

candidate

Then:

01

Then:

[no identifier]

For three seconds the nametag was a dark empty rectangle.

Stickman remained.

Then:

stickman

returned.

The Registry opened by itself.

IDENTIFIER CORRUPTION – SUBJECT PRESENT
REFERENCE MATCH – VERIFIED

Stickman typed:

WHO CORRUPTED IT

NO ACTOR DETECTED

The system had not been attacked.

It had failed deliberately or incidentally as part of the test.

Stickman looked at his nametag differently afterward.

He still considered it his.

But he understood now that even the most permanent thing anyone could see about him was not the thing making him Stickman.



THE REDACTED INDEX

The entity index had changed.

Previously:

01 – STICKMAN

Now:

00 – [REDACTED]
01 – STICKMAN
02 – [REDACTED]
03 – [REDACTED]

Stickman stared.

He selected 00.

ACCESS DENIED

02.

ACCESS DENIED

03.

ACCESS DENIED

He searched Previous.

NO CONSTANT RECORD FOUND

The redacted entries were not Previous.

He searched the Void.

ENTITY TYPE MISMATCH

Not the Void either.

He searched Archive.

ENTITY TYPE MISMATCH

Stickman tried:

NUMBER OF CONSTANTS

1 VERIFIED
3 CANDIDATES

That changed things.

He was not necessarily unique.

Only verified.

He typed:

CANDIDATE NAMES

ACCESS DENIED

He typed:

WHY REDACTED

UNVERIFIED IDENTITIES MAY NOT PERSIST

The sentence sat on the screen.

Stickman understood a little.

A candidate might stop being the same thing.

A candidate might disappear.

A candidate might fail.

He looked at oo.

Why zero?

He selected it again.

For one frame the redaction vanished.

A nametag appeared.

previous

Then the screen corrected.

00 - [REDACTED]

Stickman froze.

He selected 00 again.

ACCESS DENIED

Had Previous once been a candidate?

If so, he had failed.

Or the Archive had changed its mind.

Stickman searched Previous's notes.

He found one sentence:

I was tested once.

Nothing else.



THE WORLD THAT CALLED HIM SIR

Everyone bowed to Stickman.

He hated it immediately.

“Welcome back, sir.”

A hotel owner opened a door for him.

A bus driver refused payment.

A child asked for his autograph.

Stickman pointed at himself in confusion.

“Of course, sir.”

Murals of Stickman covered buildings.

Same empty circular head.

Same nametag.

stickman

A statue stood in the central square.

The plaque:

HE RETURNED AS PROMISED

Stickman had never been there.

He searched the local archives.

The oldest record of him was three hundred years old.

A drawing showed Stickman walking out of a lake.

Another showed him beside a king.

Another at a fire.

Every image looked correct.

A historian approached.

“You look exactly the same.”

Stickman pointed at the dates.

“Yes. That is generally considered your defining quality.”

Stickman found a diary.

The writer described Stickman leaving through a doorway and saying—somehow—that he would return.

Stickman never spoke.

He checked the signature.

Not Stickman.

Previous.

The historian looked at the page.

“That says Stickman.”

Stickman saw previous.

He closed the book.

At sunset, the murals changed.

Square heads.

Keyhole marks.

previous

Then back.

The world could not agree which traveler had been there.

Stickman took a small bronze plaque as the Archive object.

Its shelf label read:

IDENTITY CONFLICT
TEST RESULT: INCONCLUSIVE

He left it there.



THE WORLD THAT ERASED A NAME

In World 80,004, names were physical.

People carried them as glowing words above their heads.

Not unlike Stickman's nametag.

That made the world unusually interested in him.

A technician examined the dark rectangle.

"Legacy format," she said.

Stickman tilted his head.

"Very old."

She offered to scan it.

Stickman agreed.

The machine identified nothing.

```
NO ISSUER  
NO TIMESTAMP  
NO REMOVAL TOKEN
```

The technician frowned.

"Everything has an issuer."

Stickman pointed upward.

She shook her head.

"Not philosophically. Technically."

They tried removal.

His nametag vanished.

For 0.8 seconds.

Stickman felt no different.

Then:

stickman

returned.

The machine alarmed.

REMOVAL FAILED
IDENTIFIER RESTORED FROM EXTERNAL REFERENCE

Stickman stared at EXTERNAL REFERENCE.

“Okay,” the technician said. “That is not normal.”

She tried to locate the reference.

The machine displayed a map.

World 80,004.

Then Archive.

Then a third point.

No coordinates.

Label:

NONE

Stickman stepped closer.

The map erased itself.

The technician blinked.

“What were we doing?”

She no longer remembered the test.

Stickman did.

On his return to the Archive, a new result had appeared.

NAMETAG REMOVAL — FAILED
REFERENCE SOURCE: RESTRICTED

He typed:

NONE

NO MATCH

The tungsten cube shifted on its shelf.



THE PEOPLE WHO REMEMBERED TWO HISTORIES

The village had won a war.

The village had lost the same war.

Everyone remembered both.

A woman remembered celebrating in the square.

She also remembered hiding in a cellar while enemy soldiers entered that square.

A man owned a medal for bravery.

He also remembered never joining the army.

Two histories occupied the same people.

Buildings showed both outcomes.

Half the town hall was decorated for victory.

The other half was burned.

Stickman walked through overlapping memories.

Nobody found him strange.

“You were there,” an old man said.

Stickman stopped.

“In both versions.”

The old man showed him two photographs.

Victory history: Stickman stood near the fountain.

Defeat history: Stickman stood near the same fountain.

Same pose.

Same nametag.

The only identical object in both images.

At noon, the histories began separating.

People flickered.

Buildings doubled.

The world approached a recursive conflict like the Doodle Universe had.

Stickman expected the Void.

Instead, text appeared in the sky:

TIMELINE CONFLICT
REFERENCE REQUESTED

Stickman did nothing.

The text repeated.

REFERENCE REQUESTED

He pointed at himself.

REFERENCE ACCEPTED

The two histories aligned around him.

Not chosen.

Compared.

Events that differed remained recorded as branches.

Events that referred to the same person or object were linked instead of duplicated.

The village stabilized without one history being erased.

People retained memories of both.

The old man looked at Stickman.

“What did you do?”

Stickman shrugged.

He had mostly stood there.

Back in the Archive:

CONSTANT FUNCTION DEMONSTRATION
CROSS-HISTORY IDENTITY RECONCILIATION

Stickman disliked the word function.

He was not a tool.

The Archive added:

REFERENCE PARTICIPATION: VOLUNTARY

That helped.

A little.



THE CLOCK THAT COUNTED STICKMAN

The clock did not tell time.

It counted Stickman.

1

That was all it displayed when he entered the room.

The room belonged to a world of clocks, but every other clock measured something sensible: weather cycles, birthdays, tides, train arrivals, years until a mountain eroded.

This one displayed:

1

Stickman walked out.

0

He stepped back in.

1

He crossed an Edge to another city on the same world.

The clock, kilometers away, changed to:

1

A technician watched the remote feed.

“It follows you.”

Stickman pointed at himself.

“Apparently.”

They built a second clock from the same mechanism.

The first read:

1

The second also read:

1

Not two.

They placed the clocks in different worlds through a controlled Edge.

Both read:

1

The technician frowned.

“It isn’t counting instances.”

Stickman looked at his nametag.

The technician wrote a note:

COUNTS REFERENCE, NOT LOCATION

At 03:14, the clocks both changed.

01

Then:

CONSTANT CANDIDATE

Then back to:

1

The technician saw only the number.

Stickman saw the words.

He returned to the Archive.

A Registry fragment had appeared.

MULTI-WORLD PRESENCE CHECK
UNIQUE REFERENCE COUNT: 1

Stickman had never been physically present in two worlds at once.

But the test had not cared.

It had checked whether multiple valid views could make him count as more than one.

They could not.

One constant.

One reference.



VOID CONTACT

Stickman did not seek the Void.

The Void found him.

World 540,112 was a forest with glass leaves.

Wind made the entire landscape chime.

Stickman walked for hours beneath green light.

At sunset the chiming stopped.

Every leaf froze.

A black scribble appeared between two trees.

the void

Stickman stopped.

The Void did not move.

He did not move.

For almost a minute, nothing happened.

Then the forest behind the Void disappeared.

Not burned.

Not darkened.

Gone.

White absence spread between trees.

Stickman backed away.

The Void moved forward.
Not toward him exactly.
The missing world moved with it.
A bird crossed the boundary and vanished.
Its song cut off.
Stickman reached an Edge.
It failed.
Another.
Failed.
The world collapsed inward.
The Void reached Stickman.
Black lines crossed his body.
For one second he could see nothing.
Then everything was white.
Stickman remained.
The nametag remained.

stickman

The Void remained too.
It surrounded him without touching anything because nothing else existed.

A line of text appeared in the white.

VOID CONTACT – SUBJECT PRESENT AFTER EVENT

Then:

RESULT: INCONCLUSIVE

The Void contracted.

For the first time, a second nametag appeared inside it.

Not above.

Inside.

Unreadable.

Then the Archive formed around Stickman.

Shelves faded into existence.

The Void was gone.

On a shelf beside him sat a single glass leaf.

WORLD 540,112
STATUS: LOST
OBJECT: LEAF
COLLECTOR: ARCHIVE

Stickman had not collected it.

The Archive had.

That had never happened in front of him before.



THE TEST CHAMBER THAT LOOKED LIKE A PARK

The park had benches.

Trees.

A fountain.

Birds.

A food cart.

Nothing suggested a test chamber.

That was the problem.

Stickman sat.

At noon, every bird disappeared.

At 12:01, the benches changed material.

At 12:02, gravity reversed.

Stickman remained seated on the bench even as the bench fell upward.

At 12:03, the sky became a floor.

At 12:04, every object reset.

A line appeared on the fountain:

SPATIAL RESET — SUBJECT PRESENT

Stickman stood.

The vendor continued selling pretzels.

He pointed at the message.

“What message?”

At 12:05, the park reset again.

Different trees.

Different people.

Same Stickman.

Stickman began walking outward.

The park repeated.

Every exit returned him to the fountain.

At 03:14, a terminal rose from the ground.

TEST ENVIRONMENT 62
SEQUENCE ORIGIN: [REDACTED]
AUTHORITY: [REDACTED]

Stickman froze.

He typed:

WHO BUILT THIS

ACCESS RESTRICTED

He typed:

ARCHIVE

DISPLAY LAYER ONLY

He typed:

PREVIOUS

OBSERVER ONLY

He typed:

WHO IS TESTING

ACCESS RESTRICTED

The terminal knew.

It simply refused to say.

Stickman tried one more question.

WHY ME

The screen displayed:

CANDIDATE PERSISTENCE DETECTED

Then the park vanished.

Stickman stood in the Archive.

The test ended.



CANDIDATE ZERO

Previous had been Candidate Zero.

Stickman did not know what that meant.

He found proof in a sealed file.

```
CANDIDATE 00
IDENTIFIER: PREVIOUS
RESULT: FAILED
REASON: CONTEXT DEPENDENT
```

Stickman read the final line.

```
CONTEXT DEPENDENT.
```

He searched the phrase.

A constant had to persist independently of world, timeline, identity, and Archive state.

Previous did not.

Previous could cross boundaries.

Previous had a nametag.

Previous could survive unusual events.

But he depended on context.

Somewhere, some condition still defined him.

Stickman's record differed.

```
CANDIDATE 01
IDENTIFIER: STICKMAN
RESULT: VERIFIED
```

CONTEXT: NONE

Stickman stared at NONE.

He searched:

CONTEXT NONE

ACCESS RESTRICTED UNTIL FINAL TEST

The test sequence was not finished.

He looked at the tungsten cube.

WORLD: NONE.

The same word kept returning.

Not a world.

A context.

An absence of one.

Stickman wondered whether his classification and the cube were connected.

He did not yet know how.



PREVIOUS'S ONE FAILED TEST

Previous's Candidate Zero record contained a single accessible simulation.

Stickman opened it.

Previous stood in a white room.

His nametag:

previous

A message:

CONTEXT REMOVAL

The room disappeared.

Previous remained for two seconds.

Then his outline flickered.

The keyhole mark remained longest.

Finally:

previous

vanished.

The test restored the room.

Previous reappeared.

RESULT: FAILED

Previous slammed one hand against the wall.

"I was still me."

The Registry answered:

ONLY WITHIN RECOVERABLE ARCHIVE CONTEXT.

Previous stared.

“I remember the gap.”

MEMORY IS ARCHIVED CONTEXT.

“I existed.”

EXISTENCE COULD NOT BE VERIFIED INDEPENDENTLY.

Previous became angry.

That made Stickman uncomfortable to watch.

“Then what exactly are you testing?”

SELF-PERSISTENT REFERENCE.

Previous looked toward the unseen recorder.

“Why?”

No answer.

He stepped closer to the terminal.

“Why do you need one?”

ACCESS RESTRICTED.

Previous laughed without humor.

“Of course.”

The recording ended.

Stickman understood Candidate Zero better.

Previous had not failed because he was weak.

He failed a narrow definition.

The Archive could restore him because it had records of him.

But without those records, the Registry could not prove that Previous continued independently.

Stickman's final test would remove even that.

He was beginning to understand why Previous had feared it.



THE ROOM THAT REMOVED EVERYTHING ELSE

The room was inside the Archive.

Stickman had passed it hundreds of times.

One day the door opened.

Inside:

A chair.

A table.

A lamp.

A red ball.

A glass of water.

Stickman entered.

The door closed.

The lamp vanished.

Then the table.

Then the chair.

Then the ball.

Then the water.

Each object disappeared without sound.

Stickman remained.

A line appeared on the wall.

Stickman turned toward the door.

The door vanished.

The room vanished.

The Archive vanished.

Only Stickman remained in white.

For two seconds.

Then everything returned.

A second line:

Stickman did not like that.

If the Archive itself disappeared and he remained, then the Archive was not what maintained him.

A third line tried to appear.

The answer was redacted.

Stickman touched the text.

It changed to:

Then vanished.

The test ended.

The room became a storage closet full of mops.

Stickman never found the test chamber again.

THE MAN WHO REMAINED

Stickman revisited lost worlds where possible.

Not to save them.

Most were beyond saving.

He wanted to understand what remaining meant.

In one partial world, only a train station survived.

Everything beyond the platform was white.

A station clock still ticked.

A woman sat on a bench.

She did not seem frightened.

“Waiting for the last train,” she said.

Stickman sat beside her.

“What are you waiting for?”

He pointed at the white beyond the tracks.

She smiled.

“Same thing everyone waits for.”

A train arrived from nowhere.

The doors opened.

The woman stood.

“Coming?”

Stickman shook his head.

“Thought not.”

She boarded.

The train disappeared into white.

The station began fading.

Stickman found a small ticket beneath the bench.

He picked it up.

The platform vanished.

He remained.

Archive shelves appeared around him.

WORLD 301
STATUS: LOST
OBJECT: TRAIN TICKET
COLLECTOR: STICKMAN

The ticket remembered the woman’s voice.

Thought not.

Stickman placed it on the shelf.

Remaining did not feel like victory.

It felt like being the person who had to remember.



117 YEARS

The old photograph waited in the UNFILED box.

Stickman had seen it before.

A photograph of himself in the Archive.

Date:

117 YEARS BEFORE CURRENT ENTRY

Previous's handwriting:

HE HAS NOT ARRIVED YET.

Stickman brought it to a terminal.

He entered the test environment number from the park.

62.

The photograph changed.

Same scene.

But now Previous stood behind the camera.

A caption appeared:

CANDIDATE 01 PREDICTIVE FRAME
SUBJECT MANIFESTATION NOT YET LOCAL

Stickman stared.

Predictive.

The photograph had not captured him 117 years earlier.

It had predicted him.

Previous had seen a future frame.

That explained the date.

It did not explain how the system knew.

The image changed again.

A line of test text:

PERSISTENT REFERENCE DETECTED OUTSIDE LOCAL TIME

Then:

CLASSIFICATION SEQUENCE SCHEDULED

Stickman looked at his own nametag.

The system had known he would arrive before Previous ever met him.

Before Stickman remembered existing in the Archive.

Maybe before he existed anywhere local.

The photograph faded.

On the back, new handwriting appeared.

Previous:

I thought it was prophecy.

It was measurement.

The words remained.



THE REGISTRY

Stickman found the Registry late.

It was not a room.

It was a mode.

At 03:14, every Archive terminal changed simultaneously.

```
ARCHIVE INDEX became:
```

```
REGISTRY
```

Stickman selected his entry.

```
01 - STICKMAN  
VERIFIED CONSTANT  
LOCAL STATUS: PRESENT  
REFERENCE STATUS: EXTERNAL
```

He selected Previous.

```
00 - PREVIOUS  
FAILED CANDIDATE  
LOCAL STATUS: UNKNOWN  
REFERENCE STATUS: ARCHIVAL
```

He selected the Void.

```
NOT A CONSTANT  
SYSTEM FUNCTION: UNRESOLVED
```

He selected Archive.

```
NOT A CONSTANT  
SYSTEM FUNCTION: STORAGE / WITNESS
```

Stickman stopped.

The Archive called itself a witness.

He remembered lost shelves.

```
WITNESS 1: ARCHIVE
WITNESS 2: —
```

He typed:

```
WHO BUILT REGISTRY
ACCESS RESTRICTED
```

He typed:

```
WHO RUNS REGISTRY
ACCESS RESTRICTED
```

He typed:

```
WHY CLASSIFY CONSTANTS
STABLE REFERENCES REQUIRED FOR CROSS-CONTEXT CONSISTENCY
```

He typed:

```
WHAT CONTEXT
ACCESS RESTRICTED UNTIL FINAL TEST
```

Again.

The Registry disappeared at 03:15.

Archive Index returned.

Stickman now knew the tests belonged to something deeper than ordinary Archive terminals.

He still did not know whether that something was a person, a machine, the Archive itself, or a process with no operator at all.

The question remained sealed.



THE WORLD WHERE STICKMAN WAS A RUMOR

Nobody had seen Stickman.

Everyone knew about him.

The world contained stories.

A thin traveler who appeared when roads became wrong.

A faceless man with a floating name.

A figure who stood in the background of disasters and festivals.

Children drew him.

Adults used his name in expressions.

“Keep walking like Stickman.”

“Don’t follow an Edge after dark.”

There were Stickman toys.

Stickman books.

A terrible Stickman restaurant.

Stickman had never visited.

He checked carefully.

No memory.

No Archive object collected by him.

No record of local contact.

Yet the culture knew him.

A museum displayed the oldest Stickman drawing.

The date was four hundred years earlier.

The image showed his exact canonical form.

Hollow circular head.

Thin black lines.

Nametag.

stickman

A note beneath:

SOURCE UNKNOWN

Stickman touched the glass.

A memory opened.

Not of a person drawing him.

Of an Archive shelf.

The drawing had appeared in the world through an Edge.

A reference leak.

The world had built mythology around an accidental piece of data.

Stickman found that funny until he noticed one phrase repeated in old stories:

THE ONE WHO REMAINS WHEN THE PAGE IS ERASED

That description predated the Registry test records available to him.

The world knew the result before Stickman did.

Or the result had leaked backward.

He took a cheap souvenir postcard as the Archive object.

Its shelf label:

INFORMATION LEAK

SOURCE: REGISTRY PREDICTIVE RECORD

Predictive record.

Again.

The system did not merely watch what happened.

It could reference things outside local time.

Stickman wondered whether “automatic” really meant simple.



THE FINAL TEST BEGINS

The tungsten cube's label changed.

WORLD: NONE
STATUS: READY

Then:

FINAL TEST: AVAILABLE

Stickman did not touch it.

The Archive waited.

Hours.

Days.

The label did not change.

Stickman went fishing.

The cube waited.

He visited the donut universe.

It waited.

He helped Nia repair a fence in Stickcity.

It waited.

Eventually Stickman returned.

He placed one hand on the tungsten cube.

The Archive vanished.

He stood nowhere.

Not white.

Not black.

No floor.

No distance.

His nametag floated above him.

stickman

Then the nametag vanished.

It did not return.

Stickman looked up at the empty space where it should be.

For the first time, he had no label.

No visible face.

No world.

No Archive.

No object.

Nothing to establish that he was Stickman.

A question appeared.

WHO ARE YOU?

Stickman had no voice.

No nametag.

No external sign.

He drew a circle in the nothing.

It disappeared.

He tried again.

Nothing.

The question repeated.

WHO ARE YOU?

Stickman pointed at himself.

The gesture existed.

That was enough for him.

The test changed.

MEMORY REMOVAL

He forgot the Archive.

For one second.

Then remembered.

WORLD REMOVAL

There was no world.

NAMETAG REMOVAL

Still no nametag.

IDENTITY REMOVAL

Stickman remained pointing at himself.

The test paused.

A final line:

REFERENCE SOURCE DETECTED

Then:

SOURCE: NONE

The nametag returned.

stickman

The Archive reappeared.

FINAL TEST – PASSED



WHAT CONSTANT #1 MEANS

The Registry opened without waiting for 03:14.

01 – STICKMAN
VERIFIED CONSTANT
CONTEXT: NONE
REFERENCE: SELF-PERSISTENT

Stickman read the last phrase.

Self-persistent.

No world maintained him.

No Archive record maintained him.

No nametag maintained him.

Even when the nametag vanished, Stickman remained himself.

The Registry had not made him constant.

It had discovered that he already was.

He typed:

WHY NUMBER 1
FIRST VERIFIED SELF-PERSISTENT REFERENCE

He typed:

DID YOU CREATE ME
NO

That answer came instantly.

He typed:

DO YOU KNOW WHO DID

NO CREATOR RELATION DETECTED

Stickman paused.

That was perhaps the strangest answer of all.

No creator relation detected.

Not unknown.

Not restricted.

None detected.

He typed:

ORIGIN

NONE

He looked toward the tungsten cube.

WORLD: NONE.

For three books, NONE had looked like the name of a hidden world.

Now the Registry had used the same value for his origin.

Stickman typed:

IS WORLD NONE MY WORLD

INVALID MODEL

He tried:

WHAT IS WORLD NONE

ACCESS RESTRICTED UNTIL ROOT ENTRY

Root.

The brass recursive key from Book Two had displayed:

DESTINATION: ROOT

Everything was converging.



CANDIDATES

The redacted index changed after Stickman passed the final test.

```
00 - PREVIOUS - FAILED
01 - STICKMAN - VERIFIED
02 - [REDACTED] - PENDING
03 - [REDACTED] - PENDING
```

Stickman selected 02.

A single line:

```
REFERENCE BEHAVIOR DETECTED IN LOSS EVENTS
```

The Void?

No.

Registry had already said the Void was not a constant.

03:

```
REFERENCE BEHAVIOR DETECTED IN ARCHIVE ROOT
```

Stickman stared.

Something in Archive root.

He typed:

```
ROOT
```

```
ACCESS RESTRICTED
```

He typed:

```
WORLD NONE
```

```
ROOT REFERENCE
```

He typed:

```
TUNGSTEN CUBE
```

```
ROOT ANCHOR
```

The answer appeared before access could close.

Root anchor.

The cube was not a random artifact.

Not exactly.

He selected it.

```
ORIGIN: NONE
```

```
FUNCTION: ROOT ANCHOR
```

```
PLACEMENT USER: RESTRICTED
```

Stickman typed:

```
WHO PLACED IT
```

```
ACCESS RESTRICTED
```

Of course.

But one mystery had moved.

The cube came from NONE because NONE was not a world.

It was root.

Whatever that meant.

The terminal added:

```
ROOT ENTRY REQUIRES CONSTANT 01
```

Stickman looked at his own nametag.

The next book, apparently, required him.

THE VOID WATCHES

The Void appeared in the Archive.

Not at the end of a lost world.

Not in a reflection.

Inside the Archive itself.

Stickman found it beside the blue marble shelf.

the void

Black lines moved within the circular scribble.

It did not erase anything.

It hovered.

Stickman approached.

The Void shifted aside.

Behind it, the marble label displayed:

WITNESS 1: ARCHIVE
WITNESS 2: STICKMAN

The blank field had finally filled.

Stickman looked at the Void.

Its scribbles slowed.

For one frame they formed letters.

NOT YET

Then became scribbles again.

Stickman reached toward it.

The Void moved away.

A shelf behind it briefly displayed:

SYSTEM FUNCTION: CLEANUP

Then:

SYSTEM FUNCTION: WITNESS

Then:

SYSTEM FUNCTION: ERROR

The label could not decide.

The Void disappeared.

Stickman understood less than before.

That seemed appropriate.



ROOT ENTRY

The brass key waited beside the tungsten cube.

01

NOT A DOOR

Stickman picked it up.

The pedestal locks opened.

All twelve.

The pedestal room waited.

STICKMAN

Stickman carried the key inside.

A slot appeared in the pedestal.

Not key-shaped.

Cube-shaped.

The tungsten cube was still on its shelf outside.

Stickman did not bring it.

He placed the brass key on the pedestal.

Nothing.

He removed it.

A message appeared:

ANCHOR REQUIRED

Stickman returned to the cube.

WORLD: NONE

FUNCTION: ROOT ANCHOR

STATUS: READY

He lifted it.

Heavy.

The Archive floor vibrated.

Every lost-world object hummed faintly.

Blue marble.

Yellow cup.

Train ticket.

Letter.

Millions more.

Stickman carried the cube toward the pedestal.

At the doorway, Previous's final warning played from nowhere.

DO NOT TRUST WORLD: NONE.

Stickman stopped.

The cube's label was gone.

A new nametag floated above it.

No body.

Dark rectangle.

White pixels.

The text sharpened one letter.

t

Then another.

h

Then disappeared.

Stickman returned the cube to its shelf.

The pedestal locks slammed shut.

All twelve.

Root entry could wait.

Not because Stickman was afraid.

Because Previous's warning had earned caution.



WHO RAN THE TESTS

The terminal activated only after Stickman stepped away from the pedestal.

```
CONSTANT #1 - VERIFIED  
FINAL TEST - PASSED  
ROOT ENTRY - DEFERRED
```

A new field appeared.

```
TEST AUTHORITY: REGISTRY  
OPERATOR: NONE  
SEQUENCE: AUTOMATIC
```

Stickman stared.

He typed:

```
NONE AS IN WORLD NONE
```

```
NO
```

He typed:

```
NONE AS IN NO PERSON
```

```
YES
```

That answer changed the entire shape of the mystery.

No hidden scientist had been watching from another room.

Previous had not tested him.

The Archive had not chosen a series of cruel experiments.

The Registry had detected a candidate whenever Stickman survived a revision that should have changed him. It recorded the result,

scheduled additional checks when conditions naturally or artificially reproduced the relevant failure, and continued until the classification could be verified.

Some test environments had been purpose-built by the Registry.

Others had simply been worlds where the right event occurred.

No operator sat behind the screen.

Stickman typed:

WHO CREATED REGISTRY
NO CREATOR RECORD AVAILABLE

He typed:

DID ARCHIVE CREATE REGISTRY
NO CREATOR RELATION AVAILABLE

He typed:

WHY DOES REGISTRY NEED CONSTANT
STABLE REFERENCE REQUIRED FOR ROOT RECONCILIATION

Root.

There it was again.

The answer to one mystery immediately pointed at the next.

Stickman typed:

WHO PLACED CUBE
BOOK FOUR ACCESS
WHAT IS VOID
BOOK FOUR ACCESS
WHERE IS PREVIOUS
BOOK FOUR ACCESS
WHAT IS ROOT

BOOK FOUR ACCESS

Stickman stared at the repeated phrase.

Then:

WHY BOOKS

SEQUENTIAL DISCLOSURE PREVENTS PREMATURE ROOT INTERACTION

He typed:

I CAN DECIDE

YES

Then:

YOU DID

The screen shut off.

The central question of the book was finally answered.

Nobody had been testing Stickman.

The Registry had.

Automatically.

But whatever waited at root was important enough that even an automatic system had refused to explain it early.



THE LAST SHELF APPEARS

The shelf appeared while Stickman was gone.

It stood alone in the center of a corridor.

No neighboring shelves.

No wall.

No dust.

One label.

LAST SHELF

No world number.

No object.

Below:

REQUIRES ROOT ACCESS

Stickman touched it.

The entire Archive moved.

Not rearranged.

Pointed.

Every shelf rotated slightly.

Millions of objects angled toward the Last Shelf.

Like compasses.

The blue marble rolled to the edge of its shelf and stopped.

The tungsten cube rotated.

The brass key slid one centimeter.

The Void appeared far down the corridor.

Previous appeared in the cube's reflection.

For one frame.

Then gone.

Stickman stood before the empty Last Shelf.

A final line printed.

WHEN READY:
BRING PROOF

Stickman looked at the endless objects.

Proof.

One world.

One object.

Millions of proofs.

The phrase did not say bring the anchor.

It said proof.

He returned to the blue marble.

The first object in the story.

The marble remembered a girl and a city with no last day.

Stickman picked it up.

The Last Shelf label changed.

BOOK FOUR READY

THE QUESTION AFTER THE ANSWER

Stickman finally knew what Constant #1 meant.

Not first being.

Not chosen hero.

Not oldest traveler.

Not creator of anything.

First verified entity that remained itself without depending on a world, timeline, Archive record, nametag, or external reference.

That was an answer.

It was also lonely.

Stickman sat beside the Last Shelf with the blue marble in one hand.

He thought about the woman waiting for the last train.

The girl who dropped the marble.

Nia.

The fisherman.

Previous.

If worlds vanished, Stickman remained.

The Registry considered that stability.

Stickman was less sure.

A constant without anything else was just something left behind.
He placed the marble back on its original shelf.
The Archive hummed.
The Last Shelf remained.
He would enter root.
But not because a test told him to.
Not because a classification required it.
Because Previous was missing.
Because the cube had been placed by someone.
Because the Void still crossed lost worlds.
Because the Archive had been waiting longer than any of them.
And because somewhere behind all those mysteries, something had
decided the truth should be revealed in sequence.
Stickman intended to reach the final page.



EPILOGUE

ROOT

At 03:14, the Last Shelf printed one additional line.

```
ROOT LOCATION:  
WORLD: NONE
```

Then:

```
WORLD is an approximation.
```

Then:

NONE is not.

The tungsten cube rose one centimeter from its shelf.

The brass key turned in midair.

The twelve pedestal locks opened.

The HOME keyhole appeared briefly in the Doodle Universe.

The Void stopped moving.

Every Archive clock synchronized.

03:14.

A dark nametag formed over the Last Shelf.

No body.

No figure.

Only text.

The first word finally resolved completely.

the

Then the second began.

a...

The record cut to black.



END OF BOOK III

THE ARCHIVE CYCLE – BOOK III OF IV

