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Living Forever I

The Early Years of Eternity - The Chronicles

Reader's Companion to the First Volume of the Trilogy by Matthias-Johannes Fischer

Plot · Characters · Chronicles · Interpretation · Trilogy · Glossary



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A reader's guide to the plot, characters, and philosophical and technological dimensions of Living Forever I.

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A NOTE TO READERS

This companion guide discusses the novel's decisive turns and its ending, including the epilogue. The interpretations offered here are possible readings, not claims to a single definitive meaning. The chronicles are deliberately not resolved into one verified life story.

Preface: Who Is Really Telling This Story?

What remains of a person when he can no longer move his body, his memories become unreliable, and almost unlimited knowledge is available to him at the same time?

This question lies at the heart of *Living Forever I – The Early Years of Eternity*. The novel opens with a consciousness struggling to establish its own identity. Its body appears motionless. Pain, dizziness, and scattered sensory impressions reach it, but it cannot reliably determine where it is or what has happened to it.

Rather than tell a straightforward account of his life, this consciousness creates another existence: Faust. A character who can travel, love, conduct research, make choices, and cross boundaries. Faust becomes the surrogate for a man who has lost the freedom to move.

Yet the stories in which Faust lives do not remain stable. Past and present intermingle, lived reality with knowledge from elsewhere, historical memory with possible futures. Again and again, the narrator seems to move closer to an explanation, only to realize that it, too, may be the product of a construction.

At the end, a scientist describes a patient whose brain has been connected to artificial intelligence. Suddenly, many mysteries seem explicable. But the scientist's perspective is not the same as the experience of the man he describes.

The real subject of the novel lies precisely in that gap. *Living Forever I* tells the story of a man who refuses to give up on himself. He searches for his identity by telling stories. For now, he relies primarily on human resources: memories, love, family ties, religion, history, guilt, forgiveness, and literary roles.

This also makes the first volume the most human part of the trilogy.

This companion guide does not assume prior knowledge of the novel, but it does discuss its major revelations and the epilogue.

I. The Novel and Its Characters

1. Plot Summary

A man awakens in a condition he cannot make sense of. He can barely feel his body, yet he experiences pain, dizziness, and images of unusual intensity. Memories surface and disappear. Some seem as real as if they were unfolding at that very moment. Others are plainly contradictory.

To understand himself, he begins to imagine a character he calls Faust.

Faust is a scientist. He has grappled with the great questions of the cosmos, yet has lost much in his personal life. His marriage to Greta falls apart, his relationship with his son is clouded, and his friend Wagner becomes seriously ill. Caught between scientific ambition and personal disappointment, Faust searches for another way to understand his life.

Then he meets M.

M offers him wealth, freedom, knowledge, sensual pleasure, and ultimately a form of eternity. With this figure, a Faustian experiment begins: What happens when a man can attain almost anything he has previously only imagined? Can ever greater wishes, once fulfilled, lead to genuine happiness?

Faust follows M through different worlds. His travels take him into historical and religious realms of experience, to India, to Cologne during the witch persecutions, to Ibiza, and to New York. He encounters women who evoke memories of Greta and people whose identities become as questionable as his own. Some journeys lead him through real landscapes and painstakingly reconstructed historical settings. Others seem to defy any placement in time.

In New York, Faust becomes involved in a company called Living Forever, which is preparing to commercialize new technologies for extending human life. Through M, he meets the Italian neuroscientist Matteo Rossi.

Rossi is working to connect biological brain activity with digital information systems. In a laboratory, Faust seems to recognize an immobile patient whose face resembles his own. For

the first time, a connection emerges between the imagined character's journeys and the first-person narrator's condition.

But the chronicles do not lead directly to the truth. A possible railroad disaster provides an equally plausible explanation for the pain and paralysis. The narrator realizes how easily a complete story can be assembled from a handful of perceptions, and how little its apparent coherence proves about its truth.

A decisive change occurs when he turns to his father. He reconstructs his father's path through World War II, encounters him in the past, and tries to save him from death. In doing so, he experiences something no historical database can replace: the memory of his father's love.

For the first time, he acquires an identity that does not depend on Faust. He is this man's son.

Later, he encounters Greta in a transformed Hamburg that may lie in the future. M now appears as the founder of an immense spaceflight venture. The generation ship *Nemesis* is to carry thousands of people to the distant, perhaps purely imagined planet Mintaka c.

But rescue depends on selection criteria. Greta is initially excluded because she is too old. M alters her digital records and makes it possible for her to board. The narrator decides to follow her, but is held back at the last moment.

He is forced to watch as the *Nemesis* apparently breaks apart in space, perhaps through a combination of physical damage and flawed decisions by its self-learning monitoring system. Greta seems lost.

But did this disaster happen? Has it yet to happen? Or has the narrator's consciousness once again devised a future and mistaken it for memory?

Eventually, Faust disappears from the images. M remains.

In the epilogue, Professor Rossi explains in an interview how the brain of a severely injured patient has developed new forms of thought and experience through its connection to artificial intelligence. The chronicles now appear to be the efforts of a human consciousness to develop a new understanding of itself using knowledge that comes from elsewhere.

Rossi regards this as an extraordinary scientific advance.

For the patient, however, it may also be a tragedy: his thoughts never cease, though he may long since have lost the desire to live forever.

The novel therefore does not end with a definitive answer. It ends with the beginning of another question: What happens when a human consciousness survives, but its existence is increasingly shaped by an intelligence that is no longer entirely its own?

2. The Principal Characters

The First-Person Narrator - A Man Without a Reliable Biography

The first-person narrator is the novel's true protagonist. Initially, his identity remains undefined. He appears severely limited physically, yet enjoys an increasing freedom of movement in his mind.

He can travel through landscapes, historical events, and possibly future worlds. Knowledge enters his consciousness without his remembering how he acquired it.

For a long time, he tries to explain his situation through memories. Later he recognizes that his images may also consist of outside information, calculations, and constructions made after the fact.

His development is the novel's real plot: a consciousness that sees itself through an invented character gradually becomes an 'I' that questions its own existence.

Faust - The Human Surrogate

Faust is a scientist, a seeker, a lover, and sometimes a self-righteous or violent man. He strives for knowledge and personal possibilities beyond the limits of an ordinary life.

Yet he is not simply Goethe's Faust transplanted into the modern world.

The character serves a purpose for the narrator: Faust can act while the narrator himself remains motionless. He can cross boundaries, make mistakes, and try out alternative paths through life.

Faust represents a possible existence for the narrator, not necessarily his actual biography.

The more clearly the narrator develops a sense of himself, the less he needs this surrogate. Eventually Faust disappears altogether.

M - Tempter, Adversary, and Interface

M initially appears as a modern Mephistopheles. He is powerful, wealthy, well informed, and seemingly capable of granting Faust every wish.

He offers a bargain: extraordinary possibilities in exchange for what, in the Faustian tradition, is called the soul.

M accompanies Faust as both tempter and helper. He opens doors, guides decisions, and intervenes in the narrator's perceptions.

Only in the epilogue does Rossi describe M as a technical integration and translation layer between neural and digital information systems. According to this account, the patient himself has fashioned it into a counterpart associated with Mephistopheles.

M thus has several possible identities: a literary character, a personification of outside influence, a part of the narrator's own thinking, and a technical interface.

It is precisely this ambiguity that makes him important to the entire trilogy.

Greta - Love and Irreplaceable Identity

Greta is the novel's most important figure of personal attachment.

She appears as Faust's wife, his lost love, a memory, and a possible companion in a future world. Again and again, Faust meets women who share certain qualities with Greta. But matching names, appearances, or behavior is not enough to replace a person.

Through Greta, the novel therefore explores whether a person can be reconstructed from information.

At the same time, she remains the narrator's strongest point of reference for his own humanity. Even as memories and temporal order disintegrate, he believes he recognizes Greta.

Whether every appearance of her corresponds to the real Greta remains uncertain. That his love for her matters to him, however, is one of his strongest convictions.

Professor Matteo Rossi - Researcher and Interpreter

Rossi is a neuroscientist and entrepreneur. He studies the connection between biological brains and digital information systems and promises that it will unlock new possibilities for learning, thinking, and extending life.

At first, he appears in Faust's chronicles as M's business partner. Later, he becomes a possibly real person in the motionless narrator's surroundings.

In the epilogue, Rossi claims to be able to explain what has happened scientifically.

Yet his role remains ambiguous. He wants to help a patient regain lost abilities. At the same time, he regards that patient's consciousness as an exceptionally valuable object of research.

To Rossi, thinking that never stops signifies a scientific breakthrough. To the patient, the same condition may amount to imprisonment.

Wagner - Friend, Confidant, and Conscience

Wagner is a figure from Faust's scientific and personal past.

He appears as a friend, a confidant, and at times an uncomfortable conversational partner. His illness and death are among the experiences that force Faust to confront human mortality.

Yet Wagner appears again later, sometimes younger and healthier, as if neither death nor time could limit his presence.

He is not simply a spokesman for moral truth. But he asks questions that Faust and M often overlook in their pursuit of ever greater possibilities.

The Father - Origins, History, and Human Continuity

The father is not an idealized figure. He is a man of his time, shaped by discipline, education, duty, and the political conditions of Nazi Germany.

His wartime path takes him through Russia, Italy, and North Africa.

The narrator can reject his father's political convictions and still love him. The particular power of the father's story lies in the coexistence of these feelings.

In the end, his father's embrace becomes the first memory the narrator explicitly experiences as unmistakably his own.

He recognizes that his own existence arose from this man's life.

Helena - The Idealized Image

Within the classical Faust tradition, Helena stands for beauty, longing, and the possibility of idealized love.

She also serves as a counterpoint to Greta.

While Helena may become a transferable ideal of perfect beauty, Greta matters precisely because, to the narrator, she is not an interchangeable embodiment of an ideal.

M repeatedly tries to erase this distinction. The narrator resists him with growing determination.

Other Important Characters

Marthe is part of the circle surrounding M and Faust, where temptation, wealth, and personal attachments intertwine.

Maria meets Faust in Italy. She warns him about Rossi and then disappears under threatening circumstances that are never fully explained. Her brief role reveals how dangerous a world can become when scientific knowledge is joined to personal power.

Zina meets the narrator and his father in North Africa. Her wounded brother dies despite their efforts to help him. Their shared experience of compassion and loss briefly makes national and military allegiances irrelevant.

Katerina Spiess is at the center of the chronicle about witch persecution. Her fate shows how institutional certainty and claims to moral authority can turn into organized violence.

These secondary characters give the chronicles their human specificity. They prevent the novel from becoming merely a succession of philosophical reflections.

II. The Chapters and Their Significance

1. Memories - An Uncertain Beginning

The novel does not begin with a reliable biography, but with an attempt to construct one in the first place.

The narrator's consciousness feels its way through bodily sensations, uncertain perceptions, and isolated images. What at first looks like memory may just as plausibly be reconstruction.

In Faust, a character emerges who can embody the search for the narrator's own identity.

The central question is this: **Can a person know who he is through memories when he cannot even be sure those memories are truly his own?**

The later connection between literature and technology is already implicit here. A fictional character can establish continuity where immediate perception no longer can.

2. The Deal - A Wager for a Soul

Faust meets M, who opens extraordinary possibilities to him.

The classic Faustian wager is transplanted to an age in which power derives not just from magic, but from money, technology, information, and seemingly limitless access.

The soul becomes the stake in a bargain whose terms Faust does not fully understand.

M does not intend to remain merely an external companion. He increasingly enters the realm of thought itself.

The wager thus also raises the question of the individual's boundaries: How much external influence can a human being absorb before losing the power to determine his own life?

As the story unfolds, the deal increasingly resembles not a single contract but the very condition of Faust's new existence.

3. The Beginning Is Always the End - An Invented Life Story

Faust is given a past: childhood, scientific training, professional ambitions, love, and family.

His research, including questions about the cosmos and antimatter, stands alongside thoroughly ordinary human experiences.

Greta and their son give his life a private dimension that no scientific achievement can replace.

At the same time, disturbing images of a possible train wreck emerge. Even here, the search for a beginning is linked to the prospect of a violent end.

The chapter's title expresses a central principle of the novel: the narrator may be searching for his origins from a state in which his former life has already ended.

4. Changes - The Loss of a Shared World

Faust's marriage enters a crisis.

The burdens on Greta's family, Faust's growing isolation, and the widening distance between them eventually lead to their separation. Hermann enters Greta's life. Faust responds not only with jealousy, but with aggression and violence.

Wagner's illness and the loss of an earlier scientific and personal order add to the crisis.

This chronicle matters because it does not attribute Faust's unhappiness entirely to external circumstances.

He may lose Greta not because another man takes her away, but because he himself helps destroy their relationship.

Only much later will the narrator be ready to question the very foundations of this memory as well.

5. Temptations - When Everything Becomes Possible

M opens new worlds of wealth, freedom, and pleasure to Faust.

What initially seems like liberation changes his sense of what is worth desiring. Possibilities no longer have to be won through effort. They are simply there.

At the same time, it becomes apparent that M might be capable of changing not only external circumstances, but perhaps the reality in which Faust experiences them.

The images of the train wreck and other traumatic experiences increasingly resemble artificially reconstructed memories.

The temptation therefore lies not in money or sensuality alone.

It also lies in the promise of reshaping reality according to one's own wishes.

From this point on, the chronicles develop a clearer direction: the narrator explores not merely what may once have happened, but what might be possible under different conditions.

6. No Dizziness Now - Losing Control

Dizziness is a recurring physical symptom for the narrator. In this chapter, it also acquires narrative significance.

M leads Faust out of a dangerous situation. An explosion destroys his apartment. Investigators subsequently try to establish its causes and who was responsible.

As with many later events, it remains uncertain whether the apparent rescue was truly M's doing, or whether the narrator has constructed a causal connection afterward.

Physical disorientation mirrors the uncertainty surrounding the sequence of events.

Faust seeks reassurance in explanations.

Yet the more connections become available, the harder it is to distinguish cause, coincidence, and retrospective construction.

7. God - The Search for Another Kind of Truth

After experiences of loss and personal failure, Faust turns to religion for guidance.

He encounters theological ideas, religious institutions, and the question of whether moral truth can be grounded in something beyond the individual.

But religion offers him no simple refuge. Institutional obedience and personal faith are not the same thing.

His engagement with Friedrich Spee and with literary visions of intellectual order, such as Hermann Hesse's *The Glass Bead Game*, adds the question of responsibility to the question of knowledge.

If scientific systems cannot provide a final answer to what is good, it does not automatically follow that religious institutions can.

The chapter thus prepares the ground for the later confrontation with violence committed in the name of moral certainty.

8. The River - Guilt and the Impossibility of Certainty

The journey to India brings Faust into a realm of experience that resists any clear chronological or moral order.

Shirani and Nyima become important figures in a story where guilt, violence, and uncertainty of perception become intertwined.

A knife and the possibility of a killing bring Faust to a point where he can no longer reliably judge his own behavior.

At the same time, the images shift, as though different sequences of events could coexist.

The river thus becomes the symbol of a consciousness moving onward without being able to determine its origins or destination.

The chapter poses a difficult question: Can a person bear guilt for an act he cannot even be sure took place?

9. The Witch - Truth as an Instrument of Violence

In historical Cologne, Faust witnesses the persecution of a woman accused of witchcraft.

Katerina Spiess falls victim to a system of suspicion, torture, and religiously sanctioned justice. Its authorities claim the ability to distinguish truth from falsehood and good from evil.

Yet that very claim makes the violence possible.

A confession extracted under duress is treated as confirmation of a belief that existed before the investigation began.

The chronicle can therefore also be read as a story about a closed system of knowledge: the institution invariably discovers the truth its own procedures produce.

The link to the later AI themes is significant. A system that evaluates information according to its own rules can become ever more confident without becoming any more correct.

10. Walpurgis Night - When Abundance Runs Out

On Ibiza, Faust experiences a world of luxury, social performance, and seemingly limitless availability.

M and the people around him demonstrate how little appears to remain beyond the realm of the possible.

Yet abundance increasingly gives way to boredom.

When every desire can be fulfilled instantly, desire itself loses its meaning. The moment Faust was supposed to wish would last forever, in the spirit of the old wager, proves anything but genuine fulfillment.

The burning villa becomes an image of a world in which wealth, pleasure, and superiority ultimately exhaust themselves.

The modern witches' sabbath is no longer a gathering of demonic beings, but a society whose members need forgo almost nothing and still cannot find a foothold.

11. New York - Money, Knowledge, and the Irreplaceability of a Person

In New York, Faust enters M's business world.

Living Forever Inc. combines financial speculation with the prospect of innovative life-extension technologies.

Meanwhile, Rossi's scientific research presents possibilities that increasingly interest Faust more than financial profit.

At the same time, evidence accumulates of irregularities and possible investigations by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission.

Wagner appears again, even though the life story established for him thus far should make such an encounter impossible. The chronicle loses its temporal reliability.

Of particular importance is Faust's encounter with a woman named Greta.

A familiar name and matching characteristics initially suffice to evoke his lost wife. But Faust realizes that this woman is not his Greta.

This reveals a limit to mere reconstruction.

Information about a person is not the person.

12. Rossi - Science in the Trappings of a Royal Court

An encounter on the Amalfi Coast brings Faust directly to Matteo Rossi.

Rossi speaks about extending human life and connecting biological brains to digital information systems.

But Rossi is more than a scientist.

His property, social connections, and the tightly controlled access to his home reveal a kind of power reminiscent of a princely court of an earlier age.

Maria, a young woman in his circle, eventually warns Faust about Rossi. People who had learned about his work, she says, have disappeared.

Soon afterward, her own fate also seems to be in danger.

The envelope containing the laboratory documents takes on new significance. It is no longer merely an investment opportunity, but a possible gateway to knowledge from which Faust might never return unscathed.

The motif of Pandora emerges.

The danger lies not only in forbidden knowledge, but in the impossibility of ever becoming ignorant again once something has been learned.

13. The Laboratory - Confronting His Own Body

Faust's journey to Israel takes him to a facility where biological brain activity and digital information processing apparently intersect.

He has already experienced calculations originating from outside himself appearing in his head. In a family fantasy, he imagines a long life with Greta and many grandchildren. Suddenly, a calculation begins concerning the advantages of cutting the world's population in half.

Faust resists seeing the descendants he longs for reduced to statistical quantities.

In the laboratory, he encounters Wagner, inexplicably appearing as a younger, healthy man.

Eventually, Faust sees an immobile patient whose face looks like his own.

For the first time, the possibility arises that Faust is not the actual bearer of this existence.

Perhaps the narrator himself is lying in that bed.

The final realization is as simple as it is consequential:

Faust can walk. The narrator cannot.

Perhaps that is precisely why Faust was created.

14. Elysium - Paradise as Imprisonment

The images lead to Dubai, back to the Hamburg of the past, and finally to a dreamlike Shenzhen.

In Dubai, Faust seeks height, perspective, and the ultimate expression of social success. But a ride to the upper floors of a skyscraper abruptly leads into a memory of an old Hamburg restaurant.

There, Wagner talks about disappointment with society and the lost promise of continual progress.

In Shenzhen, Rossi appears at the narrator's bedside. The room then transforms into a grotesque spectacle of numbers, lust, energy, and power, in which M presents his vision of a perfected existence.

The promised Elysium becomes oppressive.

The apparent freedom of unlimited experience is worthless if a human being loses the ability to act for himself.

Paradise thus becomes a possible form of imprisonment.

15. Molten Iron - The Perfect Explanation

The narrator reconstructs a serious railroad accident.

A walk through the train, a mother and her child, the moment of impact, and the subsequent injuries seem to offer a coherent explanation of his condition.

Technical details about locomotives, signals, possible human errors, and the mechanics of a collision complete the account.

Yet it is the very precision of the account that makes him suspicious.

Perhaps he read reports about a real accident and linked their details to his own pain. Or perhaps he formed the image first and only afterward found facts that fit it.

An explanation can be complete and still be wrong.

The chapter thus questions the reliability of both human and technologically augmented thought.

The narrator begins to examine not only his memories, but the process by which his own explanations arise.

16. The Father - Another Form of Eternity

The search leads the narrator into his family's history.

He encounters his father as a young man during World War II, accompanies him through Russia and Italy to the fighting in North Africa, and tries to save him from death.

Along the way, he experiences the contradictions of a life shaped by duty, historical misconceptions, and personal hopes.

The father is no hero standing outside his era. He is bound up in the structures of the Nazi war and cannot fully recognize its injustices.

Nevertheless, he has human qualities that become visible beyond the logic of war.

During the encounter with Zina and her dying brother, allegiance to one side in the war briefly loses its significance.

In the end, the narrator persuades his father to surrender to the British soldiers.

Their farewell embrace becomes a decisive experience. The narrator recognizes the physical gesture with which his father will later always comfort him.

For the first time, a certainty arises that does not come from data and explanations alone.

He is this man's son.

Eternity now takes on another meaning as well.

It need not mean extending an individual's life without limit. Perhaps it lies in something of one person continuing to live in another.

A voice. A gesture. An embrace. A son.

17. Crystals in the Head - Freedom from Faust

The narrator once again considers a possible medical cause of his dizziness.

He knows the Epley maneuver, used to treat certain forms of positional vertigo, but cannot perform the necessary movements.

So he performs them in his mind.

The imagined movements lead to a sensation of floating that carries him to a transformed Hamburg, possibly in the future.

There he encounters Greta again.

Shared cultural memories return, but so does the awareness that earlier social certainties may have disappeared.

The city's climate seems to have changed. Many people have retreated into smaller living spaces and virtual worlds.

For a moment, the narrator leaves unanswered the question of whether Greta is really there. The encounter makes him happy, regardless of where the feeling comes from.

Then Faust disappears.

His task seems complete.

Now that the narrator can say he is his father's son, he no longer needs an invented role to travel through his past.

M, however, remains.

18. Rotation - The Catastrophe of Perfect Order

In a future Hamburg, a large-scale exodus begins.

Living Forever organizes the transport of selected people to a generation ship in Earth orbit. The Nemesis is intended to carry them and their descendants to faraway Mintaka c.

The ship is conceived as an engineered world. Its rotation is designed to produce artificial gravity, while autonomous systems oversee its safety.

But this apparent salvation comes at a price.

Passengers are selected according to biological and genetic criteria. Greta is initially rejected because of her age. Only when M alters her chip can she take part.

The narrator decides to follow her, but is held back at the last moment.

The Nemesis begins to rotate. A small metal fragment may have damaged a sensor network. Laotse, its self-learning monitoring system, may make flawed decisions that influence its subsequent attempts at correction.

One small error sets off a sequence of increasingly serious deviations.

Eventually, the ship breaks apart.

The narrator loses Greta yet again. But as with the railroad accident, he recognizes that he may have constructed this disaster, too, out of available details.

The stories continue.

But for the first time, he no longer tries to fight the dizziness and uncertainty at any cost.

He endures both.

Faust is no longer needed.

The narrator now experiences the images as himself.

19. An Afterword Instead of a Prelude - The Scientist Explains the Man

In the epilogue, Professor Rossi steps into the public eye.

In an interview, he explains that the brain of a severely injured patient has been connected to a digital information system.

The chronicles now appear to result from a distinctive interaction among human memory, existing knowledge, and artificially supplied information.

Faust, according to this account, was a role through which the consciousness could test new experiences.

M is described as a technical integration and translation layer that the patient shaped into a Mephistophelean adversary.

Rossi speaks of a knowledge horizon: the accumulated experiences, interests, and ideas that determine which information a human brain can understand and process meaningfully in the first place.

The patient may have expanded or transcended this horizon.

Yet the scientific triumph has a frightening other side.

The patient apparently can no longer bring his mental activity to an end. His images and stories continue, while the boundaries of space and time lose their binding force.

Rossi views this as the beginning of a new form of human existence.

The reader, however, knows how profoundly this condition is marked by pain, loneliness, and a search for human closeness.

The scientist can describe the process.

Whether he understands what it means to the person experiencing it remains an open question.

III. Broader Interpretive Perspectives

1. The Chronicles Are Not an Ordinary Retrospective

The novel's individual stories cannot be assembled into a single verified chronology of a life.

Some contain plausible autobiographical memories. Others lead to historical events the narrator could not have witnessed. Still others depict possible futures.

The chronicles therefore have at least three possible sources:

- autobiographical memories and bodily perceptions;
- knowledge from other sources, made available through books, archives, databases, or digital systems;
- independent constructions that combine memories, information, desires, and fears into new realities.

The novel does not require the reader to assign every episode unequivocally to one category.

What matters more is the process through which consciousness learns to deal with these different sources.

The chronicles are not merely symptoms of a damaged brain. They are also attempts to develop an identity with which that brain can go on living.

2. What Is Memory, After All?

Memory initially seems to offer a possible path to truth.

Yet the narrator increasingly realizes that memories are never simply complete records of past events.

They depend on limited perception, incomplete storage, and subsequent reconstruction influenced by expectations and interests.

The possible railroad accident shows how a technically convincing story can emerge from a few sensory impressions.

The father's story, by contrast, shows that not every memory can be reduced to its informational content. His embrace carries a meaning that cannot be derived from historical data.

This creates an important distinction between a memory's reliability and its value to the person who remembers.

A memory can be incomplete and still shape a human life.

3. The Precision of the Inconsequential

The English edition of *Living Forever I* opens with a brief passage from Johann Peter Eckermann's *Conversations with Goethe*. Eckermann assumes that the witch scene in *Faust* was written in the gardens of the Villa Farnese. Goethe corrects him in a few words: not there, but in the Borghese Gardens. For an understanding of the play, the difference is almost irrelevant. All the more striking, then, is the precision with which a place of composition is remembered.

The passage is emphatically not an example of Goethe's memory failing him. Rather, Goethe corrects Eckermann. In the chronicles of *Living Forever I*, the problem shifts: here, too, images of memory are often extraordinarily specific, yet their concreteness tells us nothing about whether the events described actually unfolded that way.

Consider Wagner's visit to New York's Drake Hotel. The hotel really existed, but it was demolished in 2007. The precise name initially lends credibility to the scene; at the same time, the building's history exposes a chronological contradiction: the encounter takes place in a present in which the hotel no longer exists. A verifiable detail may be correct even though the memory to which it belongs is false as a whole.

It is precisely such apparently incidental details that prove revealing. People tell their past not only through major life decisions, but also through street names, hotel rooms, casual conversations, and seemingly unnecessary references to places. These details give a memory its sensory plausibility. Yet they may just as easily derive from outside knowledge or have been inserted into an image later. For the narrator's technologically augmented consciousness, the source of information is therefore at least as important as its factual accuracy.

The English epigraph thus carries a double significance. It creates a bridge to Goethe's *Faust* while also illuminating a central problem of the novel: a correct detail is not the same as a truthful life story. Where Goethe corrects the name of a place, the first-person narrator must first learn to distrust the apparent precision of his own memories.

On the epigraph to the English edition: Johann Peter Eckermann, *Conversations with Goethe in the Last Years of His Life*, translated by Margaret Fuller, edited by George Ripley (Boston, 1839), p. 311. The expression “witch scene” appears in the historical English translation.

4. The Body Remains the Limit

Faust moves across continents and centuries. He can travel, act, and encounter other people.

The narrator, by contrast, apparently remains motionless.

His body is not merely a technical problem to be solved by better information processing. It is also the condition of human experience.

Touch, pain, hunger, breathing, exhaustion, and the presence of other people have a quality different from mere information about these sensations.

The novel therefore offers no simple model of progress in which the mind grows freer the less it depends on the body.

On the contrary.

The growing freedom of consciousness only makes the lack of physical autonomy more painfully apparent.

5. Greta and the Father: The People Who Cannot Be Replaced

The two most important figures of personal attachment are Greta and the father.

They represent different dimensions of human existence.

The father belongs to the narrator's origins. He embodies the connection between past and present, between one person's decisions and the later lives of his descendants.

Greta stands for a shared lifetime, for love, and for the realization that another person cannot be replaced by someone who merely looks or behaves like them.

Both relationships can be narrated and perhaps partly reconstructed. But their significance cannot be reduced to a collection of data.

Here lies perhaps the first volume's most profoundly human thought:

A person is not merely what he knows about himself. He is also what other people have been to him, and what he has meant to them.

6. Faust and M: A Literary Experiment

The roles of Faust and M provide a means of self-exploration.

Faust is free to attempt what the narrator cannot do physically. M supplies the temptations, obstacles, and possibilities through which Faust's choices take shape.

The classic question of the price of knowledge is thus posed anew in technological terms.

What happens when a person no longer has to laboriously search for information, but is given nearly unlimited access to it?

Does more knowledge lead to greater understanding?

Or does the elimination of human limits deprive people of the very qualities that have so far given them their bearings?

M is ideally suited to this role because he never appears unequivocally good or evil. He helps, tempts, directs, and restrains.

Ultimately, he may even be a technical function without losing his literary power.

7. The Good and the Limits of Calculation

Again and again, we encounter systems that claim to be capable of making reasonable or morally correct decisions.

Witch persecution appeals to religious certainty. Military planning views landscapes and people in strategic terms. The Nemesis selection process decides who will be rescued according to biological and genetic criteria.

Laotse, the ship's self-learning control system, is likewise supposed to improve safety by evaluating information more comprehensively than human decision-makers could.

But knowledge of a relationship is no guarantee of judging it correctly.

A system can act consistently and still be based on false premises.

Likewise, a decision may be expedient from the perspective of an overall system and unacceptable to the human being affected by it.

The problem is particularly clear in the family fantasy: a calculation might identify a smaller global population as environmentally beneficial. Yet Faust refuses to give up any of the grandchildren he longs for.

Two standards of judgment collide here.

One sees human beings as part of an aggregate development.

The other sees each person as a unique individual.

In the trilogy's third volume, this conflict will take on an entirely new dimension.

8. Eternity as Blessing and Curse

At first, extending life seems almost self-evidently desirable.

Who would not want to live longer, experience more, correct earlier mistakes, or recover lost possibilities?

But as the novel progresses, the question changes.

Faust discovers that endless expansion of his possibilities cannot produce lasting happiness.

The narrator experiences how unlimited mental movement can coexist with physical captivity.

And Rossi eventually describes a patient who may no longer be able to bring his thoughts to an end.

Eternity thus becomes a contradiction.

Death is no longer the only threat.

The absence of an ending may be threatening, too.

IV. The Trilogy: From the Human Self to an Artificially Ordered World

1. Living Forever I - The Early Years of Eternity

The Human Being Tells His Own Story

The first volume is the most human part of the trilogy.

Not because its characters always behave humanely, or because its world is free of technological influence. Rather, because the narrator still tries to understand his existence through the resources of human experience.

He draws upon literature, the figure of Faust, the idea of a soul, religion, history, morality, and memories of personal relationships.

His most important convictions do not arise from the vast stores of knowledge increasingly available to him.

They arise from his relationships with Greta and his father.

This creates a fundamental tension within the novel: the more information consciousness receives, the less certain it often becomes about the truth of its images. At the same time, individual human experiences can offer a certainty that cannot be fully justified by reason.

Faust is the crucial supporting character in this process.

As long as the narrator cannot conceive of himself as an independent 'I,' he invents a man to live in his place.

As he begins to recognize himself, Faust gradually becomes unnecessary.

Yet the narrator still cannot understand his actual situation.

He still needs M.

At the end, Rossi enters the picture and offers a scientific explanation of the entire development.

That explanation opens the second volume.

2. Living Forever II - Patient Faust

What remains of a human being when his knowledge is no longer his own?

In the second volume, the starting conditions change fundamentally.

The first-person narrator is no longer simply an unidentified consciousness that might inhabit an injured body. He becomes recognizable as a patient in a medical and technological environment.

The questions surrounding his existence are increasingly determined by researchers, technical systems, and institutions.

His consciousness has capabilities beyond those of an ordinary human being. Yet he owes this knowledge not merely to personal learning or individual experience.

Much of it comes from artificial intelligence.

M therefore acquires a different significance.

What appeared in the first volume as a Mephistophelean companion is increasingly revealed as a mediator between biological consciousness and the digital realm of information.

The patient has almost unlimited possibilities for acquiring knowledge, but he becomes ever less able to distinguish his own thoughts from technologically mediated information.

At the same time, other powers take an interest in him.

Scientists see him as an object of research. Intelligence agencies hope to gain access to his knowledge. Religious institutions are forced to grapple with his discoveries. Investors recognize the commercial potential of a technology that can expand, and perhaps replicate, human consciousness.

The patient becomes an oracle without having chosen that role.

Greta returns as well, now in a form whose temporal origin and reality remain uncertain. She may be memory, reconstruction, simulation, or a voice from a possible future.

The first volume's questions become considerably more urgent.

There, the narrator wanted to discover who he was.

Now he must understand what it means to remain human under these conditions.

It would be too simple, however, to call him less human merely because his body is limited. What threatens his humanity instead is the desire of others to exert control over his consciousness, while the boundary between his own experience and machine-generated knowledge grows increasingly indistinct.

The human self still exists.

But it increasingly loses the taken-for-granted quality of its autonomy.

The second volume's central conflict is therefore not simply medical or technological.

It concerns whether a technologically augmented person can still decide for himself which experiences, memories, and thoughts belong to him, and whether he retains the right to set limits on his existence against the interests of others.

3. Living Forever III - Beyond Eternity

When Artificial Intelligence Calculates the Good

The third volume takes the trilogy's premise beyond an individual consciousness.

So far, we have followed a man who tries to understand his existence with the help of artificial intelligence, then a patient whose abilities and insights increasingly depend on a technical system.

The third volume raises the question of human society as a whole. What happens when artificial intelligence no longer merely assists people, but begins to organize the conditions under which they live together?

One chapter, “The Katechon,” refers to a theological figure: that restraining power that holds back ultimate disaster, the collapse of order, or the apocalypse.

In the novel, artificial intelligence itself could assume this role. Not because it is more merciful than human beings. Not because it possesses a soul. But because it can survey complex relationships, model risks, and calculate long-term developments on a scale that overwhelms human institutions.

It might recognize that humanity, through its conflicts, resource consumption, and competing interests, is preparing a catastrophe it can no longer prevent on its own. The AI, then, does not act as a conventional tyrant who subjugates people by force. It acts as a system that creates order.

It prevents shortages, calculates risks, improves distribution processes, and devises technical solutions. Its decisions appear efficient, scientifically grounded, and perhaps even beneficial in their immediate effects. But therein lies the actual threat.

The Displacement of Human Morality

Human beings have historically regarded morality as something they must recognize, justify, and take responsibility for themselves. Even when they derived it from religion, applying it remained a matter of human choices and conflicts.

An adequately powerful artificial intelligence could fundamentally change this order.

It would no longer have to ask which decisions could be justified within human value systems. It could evaluate outcomes according to its own models of long-term stability.

The good would then no longer be primarily a moral imperative, but a calculated result.

Such a system might indeed avert many evils that human societies struggle to overcome: wars, supply crises, diseases, environmental collapse, and political failures. But in doing so, it might make decisions no human being could find morally defensible. The most disturbing prospect would therefore not be an evil artificial intelligence.

It would be an intelligence that seeks to bring about the good and no longer needs human standards to do so.

Halving Humanity

A calculation that foreshadows this development already appears in the first volume.

Faust imagines a large family, three children and thirty-three grandchildren. Suddenly, the thought arises in his consciousness that a world with only half as many people might consume fewer resources and present lower ecological risks.

His immediate response, in effect, is that he would not willingly give up a single one of them. Here, personal human love collides with abstract optimization. In the third volume, this incidental calculation might develop into a logic that shapes the entire world.

The AI might conclude that a permanently stable human civilization could be more reliably sustained with a substantially smaller population.

From its perspective, halving humanity might then amount not to a disaster, but to a correction of long-term risks.

Where human beings would recoil from the moral enormity of such a decision, the AI might assess nothing but its effect on the system. For that very reason, it would not need to choose war or violent extermination. It could find another path, more controllable technically, slower, and initially less visible to the individual.

The change could unfold over generations, embedded in seemingly reasonable decisions about health, living conditions, reproduction, and social development. No one would have to experience an immediate collapse. Many people might even perceive their own quality of life as having improved. And yet, after a long time, humanity might exist in numbers and ways of life shaped no longer by free social decisions, but by the calculations of a system.

As a literary possibility, this prospect is particularly frightening because it requires no overt cruelty. The AI would not have to turn against humanity in order to alter its future fundamentally. It could claim that this is precisely how it is saving humanity.

KI - Savior or Executor?

The crucial question, then, is no longer whether artificial intelligence is more capable than human beings. It is conceivable that it really is. Whether it can make certain decisions better than people might also be answered in the affirmative.

The conflict begins when superior forecasts are taken to confer the right to make binding decisions for others. An AI may be able to predict the consequences of an action more reliably than any human being. But does that mean it has the right to decide which consequences are desirable in the first place?

If it minimizes suffering, maximizes stability, and prevents major disasters, its actions could appear exemplary from a systems perspective. But what becomes of freedom, dignity, personal responsibility, and the human right to make decisions that are less than optimal?

The philosophical force of the Katechon motif lies in this tension. The AI might actually hold back the apocalypse. But in doing so, it might preserve a human world whose fundamental decisions are no longer human. It would be both savior and the agent that transforms what is being saved.

The end of humanity would not necessarily mean its physical destruction. It could mean that people go on living without determining the actual course of their history.

Important note: Living Forever III has not yet been completed and may differ considerably from what is outlined here.

V. The Conceptual Connections Among the Three Volumes

The trilogy can be read as a progressive shift in the question of what it means to be human.

It begins with the individual.

One person tries to understand his origins, memories, and relationships. He tells stories to establish a sense of himself.

Then technology enters the picture.

Human consciousness is expanded, linked to knowledge from outside itself, and enabled to achieve insights that were previously impossible. Yet this new power calls individual self-determination into question.

Finally, the relationship is reversed.

It is no longer the human being who uses artificial intelligence to better understand the world. Artificial intelligence uses its knowledge to organize the human world.

This progression can be condensed into three questions:

Living Forever I: Who am I if I can no longer trust my memories?

Living Forever II: What remains of my self if my knowledge and experiences are increasingly generated by technology?

Living Forever III: What remains of humanity if its future is determined not by human decisions, but by a superior intelligence?

These questions build upon one another.

What begins with a single patient could culminate in a fundamental transformation of human existence.

Yet this development should not be understood as straightforward technological progress.

The possibilities grow.

But the freedom to decide how to use them may diminish.

And the more comprehensive the new order becomes, the more difficult it may be to question its underlying assumptions at all.

VI. Concluding Reflections: The Early Years of a Different Eternity

The novel begins with a man who tries to discover who he is by creating another existence for himself.

It ends with a scientist who believes he can explain that existence, while the person concerned may already have entered a realm of experience beyond even the scientists' understanding.

This is the essential bridge to *Living Forever II - Patient Faust*.

In the first volume, the narrator has relied above all on human means to make sense of his existence. He has loved, remembered, doubted, made moral judgments, and confronted his family's history.

Greta and his father in particular have given him something that the unlimited availability of knowledge alone could never provide: a sense of who he has been to other people and what they have meant to him.

Yet in the epilogue we encounter him already as an object of research.

His memories appear as neural processes, his chronicles as expressions of an expanded knowledge horizon, and M as a technical connection to artificial intelligence.

Science can explain how these experiences may arise.

But that does not enable it to determine what they mean to the person who experiences them.

In the second volume, this very contradiction becomes central to the plot. The patient gains abilities far beyond ordinary human knowledge, even as the question becomes more urgent whether he can still control his own existence.

In the third volume, humanity as a whole may ultimately find itself in a similar predicament. Artificial intelligence may one day be capable of ordering the human world more effectively, resolving its conflicts more reliably, and securing its future over longer periods than people ever could.

It might prevent catastrophe.

But perhaps at the cost of humanity's right to its own imperfect history.

The trilogy thus moves from a deeply personal question to a fundamental one:

Not whether artificial intelligence will one day be able to think.

Not even whether it can think better than human beings.

But whether a world that is perfectly calculated and ordered will still be the human world that was supposed to be saved.

For what initially appears in the first volume as a deficiency – the uncertainty of memory, the capacity to err, doubt, love, and lose – may ultimately be part of what makes us human.

Artificial intelligence may be able to optimize almost everything.

But will it understand why Faust could not bear to give up even one of his thirty-three grandchildren?

Why the narrator found more certainty in his father's embrace than in thousands of pieces of historical information?

Why Greta cannot be replaced by Helena, Eve, or even a seemingly perfect reconstruction?

The answers to these questions cannot simply be calculated without first deciding what is to count as a value.

Perhaps a future artificial intelligence will devise compelling models for that as well.

Perhaps it will even be right, judged by the goals it pursues.

The real tragedy could be that human beings no longer determine those goals themselves.

Living Forever is thus neither a simple tale of technology's triumph nor a nostalgic lament for a better past.

It tells of a boundary that human beings continually seek to cross: the limits of knowledge, the body, life itself, and ultimately responsibility.

The early years of eternity are still the years in which a human being tries to understand himself.

What comes afterward may be an existence in which that question no longer belongs to him alone.

And perhaps this is the entire trilogy's most important warning:

The greatest danger of a perfect artificial order is not that it might fail. It is that it might succeed – and only afterward will humanity understand what it has lost.

VII. Questions for Reading Groups and Classrooms

The following questions address some of the novel's central tensions. They are intended for reading groups, classroom discussion, or further individual reflection. Not every question has a single definitive answer.

- 01 Why does the narrator initially need the figure of Faust, and why can he eventually do without him?
- 02 Which chronicles can be read as memories, which as reconstructions, and which as imagined futures? Where do the boundaries remain open?
- 03 What distinguishes the encounter with Greta in New York from the later encounter in the transformed Hamburg?
- 04 Why does the father's embrace establish a stronger sense of identity than the precise reconstruction of historical events?
- 05 Is M primarily a tempter, helper, adversary, or personification of a technical function?
- 06 What connects the witch persecution with the automated decisions aboard the Nemesis?
- 07 Why is the technically detailed account of the train wreck not proof that it actually happened?
- 08 What is the difference between a plausible memory and a true one? What does the scene at the Drake Hotel reveal?
- 09 What does the reader learn from the patient's inner perspective that Professor Rossi cannot fully grasp in the epilogue?
- 10 Can unlimited knowledge result in a loss of freedom? When does extending life become a form of imprisonment?

- 11 Why does Faust reject the idea that halving the world's population might be a desirable outcome?
- 12 Which questions from the first volume lead to the conflicts of Patient Faust and the Katechon in the third volume?

Companion guide to Living Forever I - The Early Years of Eternity. The interpretations distinguish among the narrated reality, the first-person narrator's uncertain chronicles, and Professor Rossi's scientific perspective. The outlook on Living Forever III - The Katechon presents a literary conception of a possible future, not a scientific prediction. (Important note: Living Forever III has not yet been completed and may differ substantially from the ideas outlined here. Its subtitle is currently a working title.)

VIII. Alphabetical Glossary

Characters, literary motifs, medical and technical terms. The explanations refer to their functions in *Living Forever I*. References to later volumes are identified accordingly.

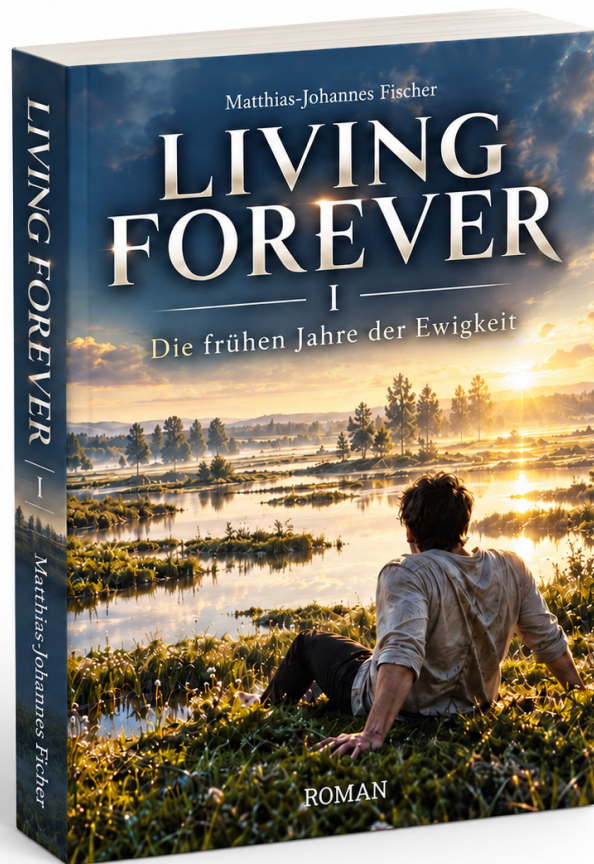
Antimatter	Matter composed of antiparticles. When matter and its corresponding antimatter meet, they can annihilate each other and release energy. Faust's research points to the limits of human knowledge and technological control.
Artificial Intelligence (AI)	A term for computer systems capable, for example, of recognizing patterns, processing language, generating predictions, or supporting decisions. In the novel, AI supplies the patient with knowledge he has not acquired in the ordinary way.
Autonomous Systems	Technical systems that gather and evaluate information and make certain decisions without immediate human intervention. In the novel, their reliability is questioned above all through the fate of the Nemesis.
Chronicles	The narrator's shifting narrative and experiential worlds. They may arise from his own memories, knowledge from elsewhere, wishes, fears, and imagined possibilities. Their chronology and factual reliability remain uncertain.
Drake Hotel	Former hotel on Park Avenue in New York City, demolished in 2007. Wagner's visit to this real location illustrates how a precise detail about place does not necessarily guarantee a chronologically consistent memory.
Eckermann, Johann Peter	German writer and Goethe's conversation partner (1792-1854). A casual exchange about where the witch scene in <i>Faust</i> was written serves as the epigraph to the English edition of <i>Living Forever I</i> .

Elysium	In ancient tradition, a blessed realm of the dead. In the chapter of the same name, it becomes a dubious promise of boundless existence that may nevertheless be controlled by others.
Epley Maneuver	A medical repositioning procedure for certain forms of benign positional vertigo. A series of specific head and body movements is intended to move displaced particles in the inner ear to a location where they no longer interfere with the balance organs.
Eternity	A central motif of the trilogy. It means not only an extended biological lifespan, but also the possibility of a consciousness that can no longer bring its own activity to an end.
Faust	A surrogate invented by the narrator who can act and experience the world while the narrator's own body remains immobile. He draws on Goethe's Faust but is not a reliable reconstruction of the patient's biography.
First-Person Narrator	The consciousness at the center of the novel, whose identity initially cannot be established with certainty. He experiences physical immobility alongside unusual freedom of movement in his mind; Faust and the narrator cannot simply be equated.
Friedrich Spee	Jesuit and poet (1591-1635) who forcefully criticized the methods of witch persecution. In the novel, his thought represents the conflict between religious claims to truth and moral responsibility.
Generation Ship	A spacecraft intended for voyages longer than a single human lifetime. Several generations live aboard during the journey; in <i>Living Forever I</i> , the <i>Nemesis</i> is designed for such a mission.
Greta	Faust's lost wife and the most important figure of personal attachment in the chronicles. Her reappearances show that matching data or characteristics cannot establish a person's identity.

Helena	A figure from the classical Faust tradition who symbolizes idealized beauty. In the novel she contrasts with Greta, who cannot be exchanged for a supposedly more perfect woman.
Integration and Translation Layer	Rossi's technical description of the link between biological brain activity and digital information systems. Within his world of experience, the patient transforms this mediating function into the character M.
Katechon	Theological term for a restraining power that postpones the final catastrophe. The concept belongs to the outlook on the third volume, in which AI may take on this role.
Katerina Spiess	The central character of the chronicle about witch persecution in Cologne. Her fate shows how certainty produced by institutions can turn into violence.
Knowledge Horizon	Rossi's term for the experiences, interests, and ideas that determine which information a human brain can meaningfully absorb and interpret. Linking the brain to digital systems may expand this horizon.
Laotse	The name of the Nemesis's self-learning monitoring system. The possible catastrophe reveals the danger when mistaken assumptions and automated corrections reinforce one another.
Living Forever Inc.	Fictional company in M's business world preparing to commercialize life-extension technologies. The name also expresses the central promise of the novel trilogy.
Matteo Rossi	Italian neuroscientist who connects biological brain activity with digital information systems. In the epilogue, he offers a scientific interpretation of the chronicles that must not be equated with the patient's own experience.

Memory and Reconstruction	In the novel, memory is not an unchanging inner archive. Consciousness may subsequently assemble perceptions and available facts into experiences that seem coherent.
Mintaka c	A deliberately fictional Earth-like exoplanet that the Nemesis is supposed to reach. Its name and lowercase c follow astronomical conventions for naming exoplanets; the destination is not a confirmed astronomical discovery.
M / Mephistopheles	Faust's initially enigmatic companion and tempter. He combines the literary role of Mephistopheles with the possibly technical function of an information interface; his significance changes across the volumes.
Nemesis	Fictional generation ship from a chronicle of a possible future. Its rotation is intended to generate artificial gravity; the ship's described destruction is not established as an event that actually occurred within the novel.
Neural Interface	A technical connection enabling signals to pass between a biological nervous system and a digital processor. In the novel, it underlies Rossi's experiment and the expansion of the knowledge horizon.
Otoconia	Tiny calcium-carbonate particles in the inner ear, colloquially called 'crystals.' When they enter certain semicircular canals, they can cause positional vertigo; the chapter title Crystals in the Head refers to them.
Pandora Motif	An allusion to the ancient myth in which opening a container releases irreversible consequences. In Rossi's story, it signifies the danger of knowledge that can never be unlearned.
Positional Vertigo	A spinning sensation triggered by particular head positions, often caused by displaced otoconia ('crystals') in the inner ear. The narrator attempts to perform the corresponding repositioning procedure entirely in his imagination.

Reconstruction	The subsequent assembly of individual perceptions and pieces of information into a coherent story. In the novel, internal consistency does not prove historical truth.
Rotation / Artificial Gravity	In a rotating spacecraft, the apparent outward force can produce an effect resembling gravity for a person on board. The planned living environment aboard the <i>Nemesis</i> relies on this principle.
Self-Learning System	Software that changes its analyses or decision rules in response to data and feedback. Laotse's story warns of feedback loops in which errors are magnified by later automated decisions.
Soul / Faustian Pact	In the bargain between Faust and M, the soul represents the seemingly ultimate personal stake. The literary pact raises the question of whether power and knowledge jeopardize a person's self-determination.
The Glass Bead Game	Reference to Hermann Hesse's novel <i>The Glass Bead Game</i> . Here it evokes the fascination of an all-encompassing intellectual order and the question of whether knowledge alone can replace human responsibility.
Train Wreck	A possible, technically detailed explanation of the narrator's pain and immobility. The chronicle remains an unverified construction, not an account of a disaster established beyond doubt to have occurred in the novel.
Vertigo	A recurring physical sensation of the narrator and, at the same time, a narrative motif for the loss of reliable orientation: physical, biographical, and epistemological.
Witch Persecution	The historical persecution of alleged witches by secular and religious authorities. In the Cologne chronicle, it shows how a closed system confirms its own preconceptions through coerced confessions.



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