

8 year old Charlie Brown sat on a pier, playing a game and watch, constantly losing.

He admired the way the sunset painted itself in the waters reflection. Sure, red wasn't everybody's colour, but for those to whom it was it reminded him of the few traits that made the 90s so good: there was a peace, and even an operatic grandeur, to this peace.

He heard this peace in Selena, Laura Pausini, and even Celine Dion's voices: epic ambience through the everyday toil that reminded them they were alive.

That their souls still had so much to do here.

Peggy Jean emerged from the shadows,

her silhouette illuminated by the fading light of the day. She approached with a gentle wave, holding out a Gameboy.

"Wanna play?" she offered, a hopeful smile tugging at the corners of her lips.

Charlie Brown's face contorted.

"What happened?" he asked, taking the Gameboy from her.

"It just wasn't working out," Peggy Jean replied, her voice a soft whisper that seemed to carry the weight of a thousand unspoken words. She sat down next to him, her eyes focused on the horizon as if the answer to all her troubles lay somewhere beyond it. "Watcha been up to, Brownie Charles?"

Charlie Brown smiled.

"You know, I've been thinking," he began, his voice carrying the excitement of a new idea. "This internet thing, it's like a whole new world, right?"

Peggy Jean nodded, curiosity piquing as she glanced at the Gameboy in his hands.

"You know what, Charlie?" she said, turning to face him. "It's like what Sean Parker talked about a few years back. He wanted to make all music available to everyone, all the time."

Charlie Brown nodded, eyes lighting up as he saw the parallel. "Yeah, but for games! Imagine it, PJ. We could call it 'GameNet' or something. It'd be like a library, but for games!"

Peggy Jean raised an eyebrow, skepticism etched on her youthful face. "But the internet's still just a bunch of nerds swapping text files and pictures of cats, right?"

"No, no," Charlie Brown insisted, his eyes sparkling with enthusiasm. "It's so much more than that. It's like a superhighway of information. And games, PJ, think about it. Games! We could share them, so no one has to miss out."

Peggy Jean tilted her head, considering his words. "But where would we even begin? It's not like we can just upload games willy-nilly. And the internet's still pretty new. Plus, we're just kids. How are we gonna convince anyone to take us seriously?"

Charlie Brown took a notebook that read

contacts out. He opened it, finding names from Morton G. To Lyman to Zonker and even a Manolo jotted down.

Charlie Brown held Peggy Jean's hands.

"Are we gonna be kids all our lives, PJ?" said Charlie Brown "Or are we gonna be the future?"

Peggy Jean studied the names scribbled in the notebook. Each one represented a potential ally in their quest. She knew Charlie Brown wasn't one to give up easily. If he believed in this "GameNet" idea, she had to at least give it a shot.

Years later, the two of them had transformed an abandoned church into a cyberpunk sanctuary. The walls, once adorned with biblical frescoes, now held

racks of cathode-ray tubes and tangled webs of ethernet cables. The once-sacred space had become a temple to their vision of a world where games were as free as the air they breathed.

At the center of this digital sanctum stood the crown jewel of their operation: a 1999 IMac, its fruit-shaped design a relic of a time when technology was still new and exciting. It hummed with the promise of their impending success.

"We're almost there, Peggy" said Charlie Brown, before taking a sketchy looking Floppy disk, consisting of mostly black with clouds of blue and yellow, out "all that is left is to make this a world tour"

Peggy Jean looked at the floppy with a mix of excitement and fear. "Where did you get

this, Chuck?" she asked, her voice a bit shaky.

"The Tinocos Family," Charlie Brown replied, a hint of awe in his voice. "They're like the Robin Hoods of the digital age. They've been helping me with the coding, and they said this would be the key to unlocking the full potential of our GameNet."

Peggy Jean took a step back, her eyes wide with a mix of excitement and fear. "But what if something goes wrong?"

"It's going to be fine," Charlie Brown assured her, his hand hovering over the floppy disk drive. "We've got this."

But as he inserted the disk, the room was bathed in a sudden flash of light. The Imac

screached and convulsed as if alive, sending a shockwave through the air. Before Charlie Brown could react, Peggy Jean dashed forward and pushed him away with all her might.

The explosion was like a sonic boom, rippling through the church and shaking its very foundations. Sparks danced around the I Mac, illuminating the room in a shower of electrical fury. The force threw Charlie Brown back, and he watched, horrified, as the light engulfed Peggy Jean. Her eyes widened, and she screamed, but the sound was swallowed by the deafening cacophony of techno-chaos.

And then, as suddenly as it began, everything went still. The room fell silent, the only sound the steady beep of the I Mac, now an eerie pulse in the shadowy



space. Slowly, Charlie Brown picked himself up, his heart racing as he stumbled over to where Peggy Jean had been standing. But she was gone. The only trace of her existence, the fading scent of her hair in the smoky air.

In her place stood a figure, flickering and translucent, a digital ghost trapped in the pixels of the monitor. It was Peggy Jean, or at least, a part of her. Her eyes, once so full of life, were now cold and unblinking, staring into the abyss of the computer screen. The words "I should've warned you, this was not a safe time to trust anyone beyond our borders" scrolled in a retro font across the blackness, as if the very essence of her soul had been transformed into binary code.

Charlie Brown was devastated. Was this

REALLY who PJ was now?: An Ifruity?

"Peggy... You're alive?" He began "in a computer?"

"In a way," she replied, her digital voice a ghostly echo. "But it's not the same, Chuck. I'm... I'm stuck in here."

The guilt washed over Charlie Brown as he realized the gravity of their situation.

"Peggy, I'm so sorry. I never knew you had someone else. I should've asked..."

The digital specter of Peggy Jean looked at him with a sad smile. "It's okay, Chuck. I never told you because I didn't want to lose what we had. But now, it's all gone."

"No, it can't be," Charlie Brown insisted, his voice thick with determination. "We'll find a

way to get you out of there. We'll make this right."

The digital Peggy Jean sighed, the sound echoing through the room like a mournful digital whisper. "Chuck, you know the stories about the y2k bug. They say it's going to reset everything. Maybe it's for the best. Maybe when the clocks tick over to the new millennium, my soul will finally pass on."

"But you're not gone," Charlie Brown said, his voice trembling as he reached out to touch the monitor. His hand passed through the flickering image of Peggy Jean. "You're just...different now."

Peggy Jean's digital form nodded, the pixels blurring with the motion. "But remember, Chuck," she said, her voice

growing weaker, "I'll always be here. Every time you see a screen, every time you hear a dial tone, or even when you get a page on that newfangled pager thing, I'll be with you."

With a heavy heart, Charlie Brown nodded. "I'll never forget you, Peggy."

Peggy Jean's digital visage flickered, the smile on her lips never faltering. "I know, Chuck. And even if I'm not here in the flesh, I'll always be with you in spirit."

With a sudden burst of resolve, she reached out, her digital hand pressing against the side of the IMac, and with a silent command, the power surged. The lights in the church flickered, then went out. The IMac's steady beep grew louder before it too went silent. The room was

plunged into darkness, the only light coming from the moon that shone through the stained glass windows.

From that day forward Charlie Brown set out to give his plan a new route: the Vigilante one.

After what he went through he fealt cheated. Eluded.

Bilked.

The word made more sense to him now than it ever had in his entire life. From that this "Sect" was born:

The Bilk Division.

(Epilogue)

Years had passed since the fateful night at the church. Charlie Brown had become a legend in the digital underworld, a Robin Hood-esque figure known for his radical methods of sharing games across the globe. His eyes had seen the depths of the internet's darkest corners, and his name had become a whisper of hope for those seeking access to the digital playgrounds that were once out of reach.

Now, in the early 2000s, the world had moved on from the fear of the y2k bug. Technology had advanced, and with it, so had the Bilk Division. They had evolved from a simple torrenting group to a formidable force, fighting against the tyranny of the gaming industry's elite who sought to control the flow of information.

One evening, as the sun set over the

sprawling cityscape, casting long shadows through the neon-lit streets, Charlie Brown, now a man in his late 20s, sat in a dimly lit arcade, surrounded by the glow of CRT screens and the clatter of arcade cabinets. His eyes were drawn to a figure standing by the change machine, her silhouette framed by the flickering lights.

And yet despite his age, he looked the same. This congenital growth hormone left him as young as that same sunset he saw in his childhood lifetimes ago.

The arcade was a bastion of nostalgia, a place where the digital dreams of yesteryear still lived on, untouched by the relentless march of progress. The smell of stale popcorn and cigarette smoke clung to the air, a comforting reminder of the past.

"You're the one they call 'The High Boss', aren't you?" The voice was cool, almost uninterested, yet it had a sharpness that cut through the din of the arcade.

Charlie Brown looked up from his game of Pac-Man, his thumbs still twitching on the stick. The girl standing before him was slightly older than he was when this idea for what enemies called "The Sect" first came to him.

"Eileen Jacobson," she said, extending a hand. Her grip was firm, almost too firm for the delicate frame that contained her. She had the aura of a cobra, poised and ready to strike, yet her manners were as smooth as silk. "I've been watching your work, Mr. Brown."



The End