

How long had it been? One year, five years or perhaps even ten years that had managed to pass him by. In the beginning it had been important to him to record the passage of time, a means for him to hold onto his sanity, until slowly he forgot about it, lost in his thoughts of what had once been.

There, somewhere to his right, his mind alerted him.

Heightened reflexes propelled him into action, keen eyes trained upon the pile of rubble where only seconds before there had been some small sign of activity. Stone and mortar trickled down on the graveyard of walls, marking the decay of the once proud structures that had ruled this city.

In what seemed to be no more than a wishful dream he was able to recall the beauty of this town that had once been home to thousands, that was until all hell had broken loose. Now he was all that was leftover from the race that had built these magnificent monuments. He was the only survivor from his race, alone in his struggle to survive against a new-found enemy.

Somehow the metal beings that had once been built to serve mankind had known what was about to happen and had prepared for the final day in the planet's current chapter of the history book. They had started their own chapter, one without any of his kind in it. That was why he was so cautious on the outside, somehow they knew that he was still alive, and that was a situation that they wanted changed.

That didn't stop him from coming to the surface though, for deep inside he still hoped that there were other survivors. There had to be others or otherwise his survival was for nothing. In the months that he had been searching for them, he had played countless scenarios over and over in his preparing himself as to how he would act, how they would as a group react and how they would take back what was theirs.

Time to move on, he had been standing there for way to long thinking about how things had used to be. He was doing that more often these days, sometimes floating so far away into his dream that when he came to he had no idea where he was or how he had gotten there.

The shadows had become his close friends during his trips to the outside, he clung closely to them as he darted from one building to the other, his weapon at his side ready for the metal others if they decide to attack him.

A large boom resounded in the still air.

Somewhere behind him, he knew that the noises must have come from there, enshrouded within the confines of the numerous echoes reverberating from wall to wall.

Cowering against one of the stone pillars that still managed to rise forth from the ground to touch the sky, he surveyed the area from where the noise had come.

Nothing!

He sighed and lowered the rifle which itself seemed to sigh, as if sadden at having missed the excitement of some action.

Wait there to the right side, the shadow was wrong. Was that the way that his shadows looked when he was hiding, somewhat bulkier and darker in its texture?

In the shadows there appeared to be something crouched over, watching the area that was his own shadowy retreat. There was something wrong with the shadow; something that pushed at his thoughts, alerting him to the fact that it couldn't be one of the androids that roamed the area. Could it be, after all this time, another survivor?

He wanted to run out and embrace the shadow, to feel the warmth of other beings like himself, to feel the blood pulse through their body and remember how it had once been. As much as he wanted to leave his hiding place he could not, the androids had been getting trickier of late and there was every chance that this was yet another one of their attempts to dispose of him. But still the shadow looked wrong.

Instead he contented himself with crouching the shadows, watching his new-found anomaly, waiting to see what would happen. He was sure that he would be able to out wait the other until they made the mistake that would lead him to discover their identity. As he waited he started to daydream of what it would be like if there were other survivors.

Perhaps they were scouts from their community that lay in waiting somewhere for others to join them until they were strong enough in numbers to take back the world, their world, from the robots and computers that now controlled it. Maybe there were females in their group, females without a partner. It had been some time but he was certain that he remembered in full the warmth and love that was shared between a couple.

He had once been a couple, before the madness that consumed his world took his other half away and left him feeling incomplete, alone and guilty for surviving his mate. What had been her name he wondered, invisible fingers probing his mind for that singular piece of information that had been filed away years ago. But it was lost to him, hidden far away to protect him from the pain that it would conjure up with it.

Bang.

His mind jumped back into action, he had been away again caught up in his fantasies, but for how long. How long had he just been sitting there day dreaming? Fear started to creep its way into his mind, body odours changing to match the new emotion that was taking control while conditioned eyes probed the shadows to try and find the anomaly that had previously been the centre of his attention.

It was no longer there; having slipped away at some stage while his mind had been wandering. How long though? How long had it been since the bulge had disappeared and why had it decided to move?

Surely if it had been one of the robots it would have eventually made him out from the darkness and then attacked, but he was still alive. Should he stay where he was or should he try and move on and out manoeuvre whatever it was that was out there.

Crunch.

Something was approaching; crunching rubble underfoot as it approached. It was too clumsy, or was that arrogant in not trying to disguise its approach, for a human. So now there were two of them out there, the first one having called for reinforcements before deciding to attack. He had so hoped that it had been another human, but those hopes were now dashed, buried under the rubble that surrounded him.

It was time for him to fight for his survival yet again in this wilderness that was his home. His trusty laser rifle was primed and ready for action against both the approaching and hidden figures, all that he had to do was wait until they both came into view again.

His sense of hearing had become more developed since the disaster, his only means of tracking as his sense of smell was no longer really required, the robots giving forth no odours that would identify them. So he lay in wait his ears primed for the first sign of the enemy.

It wasn't long before the robot had made its way through the rubble to stand in the small clearing just outside his hiding place, the clearing had once been referred to as an alleyway, now it was nothing more than home to decaying buildings. His rifle rested on a small mound of rubble that gave him ample protection from the robots heat sensors. Every few seconds he dared to steal a glance at the clearing and his intended victim, preparing himself mentally for his planned attack.

Satisfied that he was ready to engage his target he popped his torso out from its hiding place and rested the butt of the rifle into his right shoulder, receiving a sense of comfort from its snug fit.

The metal shell was looking in the other direction, probably trying to trace the heat trace that was left over from when he had been not to long ago, or ever trying to locate its companion for clarification of their intended target.

Not that it really mattered to him except for the fact that it made his job even easier it his target wasn't looking in his direction. Slowly his breathing became more regulated as he stared through the small sight on the end of the barrel lining it up for a clean kill.

He had learned long ago that the most vulnerable part of the metal assailants was the small tubing that lay exposed on what was the equivalent of the robot's neck. This tubing acted like the artery delivering life-giving fluids to the robot's main processors, without these fluids the robot perished within seconds.

Just as he was about to squeeze the trigger that would signal the removal of the life force that was the robot something completely unexpected happened. From the first floor of the building on the other side of the clearing a giant piece of mortar broke loose from its confines and plummeted to the ground taking the robot with it in its death march.

It seemed as though luck was with him today, as now he needed not to worry about the charge up time needed for his rifle before trying to take out the other figure wherever it was.

Scanning the decay to try and locate the missing shadow he let his curiosity carry his eyesight to the place from where the boulder had broken free from its confines, the sight that met his prying eyes made his heart skip a beat. There in the frame of what had once been a window was another human, a survivor like himself, a female survivor.

Long unused vocal chords tried to come to life. At first only allowing a release of empty breath until at long last he found himself able to call to the figure that had captured his view, all the time he had started moving out into the open without ever releasing it, eyes never leaving the female form above him. Moisture gathered on his cheeks from puffed up eyes, and still he did not lose sight of the other survivor.

"Hello," he whispered at first, his first spoken word for so long only to repeat that singular word of greeting again and again until he was shouting it out, the strange sound of a human voice bouncing around the empty buildings which had once been so full of life.

Tears of joy were flowing freely, salty trails running from his eyes down stained cheeks catching themselves in the corners of his mouth. He was no longer alone in this dying world.

The woman looked down at him, the joy of seeing someone else exposing itself upon her dusty features. Sunlight glistened from the fresh tears that she was also shedding.

"Wait there," she finally managed to command him, seconds later disappearing in the dark room, moments later to re-emerge into the clearing where he stood waiting for her. Time stood still as the two figures stood amongst the rumble and looked at each other neither one wanting to break the magic of the moment, each scared that the other was nothing more than an illusion.

Slowly they moved closer to each other, each step taken with care until finally they stood next to each other, close enough to smell the heavenly fragrance of their counterpart, to feel the warmth of their breath against their exposed cheeks.

So they remained until finally the emotion of the moment took control and they embraced. Tear-choked laughter echoed throughout the alley as the two interlocked figures danced to some unheard music.

"You're real." he finally gasped releasing his grip on her slightly, no longer afraid of her disappearing like a mirage on the distant horizon.

"Yes, we're both real. Oh god I thought that I was the only one left, besides the robots that was."

"I know what you mean. Christ it's great to speak to someone again, I'd almost forgotten what it was like. For awhile I started having conversation with myself thinking that it would stop me from going mad, instead it started to have the opposite effect so I stopped and haven't really spoken since. I'm glad I remember how."

"I'm Judith by the way. What's your name?"

Names. He hadn't used names for so long, he knew that he had one but it was buried away somewhere in the back of his mind. What was it? Deep lines etched themselves across his forehead as he strained to remember who he was.

"John, John Chester Watts. My name is John Chester Watts," he almost shouted out, actions that produced a burst of laughter from both himself and the woman standing next to him.

The stream of sunlight that once filled the clearing was slowly starting to dissipate, blocking out a dark rolling cloud line on the distant horizon. One of the now typical electrical storms was heading their way, in the distant the crash of thunder marked its progress.

"Com'on we'd better get out of here, there's a storm brewing and it's not wise to get caught in one. My place isn't too far from here, we'll be safe there."

Off in the distance the sky exploded with a bright mixture of red and yellow followed closely by an ear splitting boom that almost made you feel as though the earth had just been ripped apart. Judith flinched at the sound as if somehow it had brought with it a flood of some painful memories that would otherwise have remained hidden deep inside.

Together they raced through the rubble strewn streets one step ahead of the storms destructive power, both of them having lived in this new world long enough to know that anything that got caught in one of the electrical storms that reeked havoc on the planet was a goner.

John had escaped his first contact with one of the robots that scoured the countryside during a storm. He had tried hiding from the robot in what was left of a small shopping complex. From his hiding place he was able to witness the destructive force of the storm first hand.

What could only be called a fire bolt had broken forth from the dark storm clouds and struck the robot with tremendous force, the resulting explosion causing all of the store windows to be blown out. After the storm had passed he left the safety of his hiding place to inspect the damage, what he saw outside was enough to make him realise that being outside in one of these storms was not a smart idea. What had once been a paved mall was nothing more than a large crater several feet deep and wide.

That was then though and this was now and they needed to reach shelter from the storm quickly. Another explosion lit up the rolling darkness, splashes of red decorating an otherwise dismal skyline. All the time they were running as though the hounds of hell were nipping at their feet.

John came to an abrupt halt outside of a semi-decayed building and signal to Judith that they had arrived at their destination. On the wall of the building lay the remains of a sign which simply read 'mmon ealt ank'.

The building, unlike the ones where they had met, consisted of only one floor. Gaps appeared in what had once been the ceiling, parts of it have caved in from the force of the storms and its being neglected for so long.

Judith tugged at John's arms trying to pull him back outside of the building. Realising the reasoning for her concern he quickly tried to reassure her that they would be safe here.

"At the back there is a steal room which can be sealed and released from the inside, I think that they use to call it a safe." He paused half way through his explanation trying to remember what it was that this building has once been, his mind having long ago shut out all of the irrelevant information that was no longer needed for his survival. "Funny how you start to lose images that were once associated with certain words after a while."

In the distance another fireball let lose its devastating power, no doubt leaving behind yet another scar on the landscape. There was no more time to argue the point of safety, either the room where they were heading was safe or not.

Once inside John pulled the thin metal door closed enclosing the two bodies within a blanket of darkness. Eyes tried without success to adapt to the darkness in vain, its veil of black so thick in its construction to blot out all forms of natural light.

From within the gloom that had surrounded them, Judith could make out the sounds of querying hands searching for some secret treasure hidden deep inside

the metal confines that surrounded them. Their goal achieved the probing noises were replaced with the fumbling sounds of fingers in search of a switch or other such device that required some coaxing to bring it to life.

Light flooded into the darkness forcing it to release its grip and retreat into the unseen corners and alcoves where the light was unable to reach. With outstretched hands, Judith reached out towards the source of light only to quickly pull back upon finding no heat emanating from it.

"It's an artificial light source, not a fire," John informed her trying hard to hide the reverberations of laughter that pulled at his words. "It runs on a battery that gets its power from the sun, there were lots of these things where I worked."

Pain ripped through his lower torso at the mention of his work to be slowly replaced by numbness seconds later. Fear pumped through his body as hands darted to legs which could no longer be felt, only to find them where they had last been.

As quickly as it had arrived the moment passed, the warmth of freshly flowing blood alerted him of the return of feelings within his legs. Absently his mind shrugged off the feelings that had just gripped him, certain in the fact that it was nothing more than a pinched nerve or something like that and he returned his attention to his guest.

"Welcome," he remarked, open arms gesturing to their surroundings. "It's not much but I call it home."

"It's nice. I don't have a, " a small pause punched its way into Judith's dialogue, a momentary lapse before she continued, "a home, haven't had one for a long time."

"How did you survive?" It had been the one question that he had wanted to ask from the moment that they had met, and now for the first time he had the chance to do so. Secretly he hoped that she had managed to survive due to some very simple reason, that way there was the chance that perhaps there were more survivors after all.

"My father had built a shelter years ago, lead lined I think he had said. Anyway when the first bomb was dropped he herded us together into the shelter.

After a week had passed my father had released one of the animals he had in the shelter to see what it was like on top, he had a camera installed so he could see the surface. When the animal survived on the surface for two full days my father said it was safe to exit the shelter."

"You mean that you survived with others. Where are they now?" excitement edged its way into his question; there were more survivors out there.

Silence greeted his question, and as each second passed from his having asked it he started to dread the answer more and more. Finally the silence was broken and explained.

"We were ok for the first few days, at night we would gather in the shelter and eat while during the day we searched for others, the first to get missing was my brother Thomas. He just went out one day and never returned. I think that the robots found him.

My father decided that in future we were to go in groups when looking for survivors so as to provide protection for the others. A week later I was

unable to join the others as they searched because I had caught some sort of cold, it was the first time that I saw one of the storms.

You see my father had left the camera on and I saw it all happen. One minute they were just standing there and the next fire exploded on the screen and there was nothing left."

She paused in the telling of her tale momentarily to take a sip from the drink that John had offered to her; the moisture relieving dried lips. Her thirst quenched she continued with her story.

"My fever worsened over the next few days and my memory is vague about what happened during the weeks where I was ill, at one point I thought that I saw some robots trying to enter the shelter only to be destroyed by another one of the storms. It was almost as though the storm knew that there was something there to destroy.

After the fever broke I decided to stay in the shelter and not go to the surface again, I had enough food to keep me going for awhile. I don't know how long I stayed there all I know is that I've been here for as long as I could. At some stage the power failed and I had to make a fire to provide any light and heat in the shelter, I guess it must have been winter outside at the time, either that or I was still under the influence of the fever.

Eventually my food supplies ran out and I had no choice but to go to the surface to try and find something to eat. At first finding food wasn't a problem, but later it got more and more difficult. During one of my trips to the surface I saw a group of robots herded other survivors together, only to kill them were they stood."

Again she paused and lifted the glass to her mouth, sense relishing the tastes that assailed them, as she did so John found himself remembering having seen similar sites during his journey on the outside. His train of thought was broken by the sound of Judith's voice as she continued her throat once again renewed.

"It was at that point that I guessed at what had happened to Thomas, he had been a computer scientist before and I'm certain that if he had seen the robots he would have approached them thinking that they were there to help him.

I guessed that I panicked a little at what I saw because I started to run, not really seeing where I was going, by the time I realised this it was too late and I was lost. Everything looked different from before, you know with it all being empty and not looked after I couldn't tell what was what from my own home town.

So I started to make my way through the ruins, eating whatever I could find, evading the storms and robots however I could, eventually I started to kill them like that one today. How about you?"

There was something about her story that puzzled him, it was almost as though he knew exactly what it was that she was going to say before she said it, but before he had the chance to quiz her about it he had become the centre of attention.

Strangely he found himself wanting to relieve his life story to this woman who sat across from him. It was comforting to know that he was able to finally tell his tale to someone, in some ways it made it all seem worthwhile to have survived.

"I was a marine biologist before the war, if you can call it that I'm still not certain what actually happened. Anyway I had been on a dive and had been forced to surface too quickly; needless to say I was automatically placed inside a decompression chamber to stop me from getting the bends.

It was during the time that I was in the chamber that the bombs were dropped, something in the lining of the chamber must have saved me. Unfortunately it did not save me from seeing what was happening on the outside. One minute my colleagues were gathered in front the small glass window looking in on my progress, the next thing they were engulfed in an intense white light. It was so bright that I thought that I had seen their skeletons shine through their skin, the next thing I knew they were gone.

When my body had been pressurised the door to the chamber popped open and I was able to leave it. Outside the chamber were a number of dust piles, it was all that remained of my colleagues. I guessed at the time that it must have been a neutron bomb that was used, in theory the bomb was able to wipe out all life while leaving buildings and other structures intact. I never thought that one had actually been built, let alone that it would ever be used.

Anyway I made my way through the building trying to find out if there was some other survivors, we had a number of lead lined rooms within the complex. My search was in vain, though I did come across something that made me wonder as to what had actually happened.

We had a lot of deep-sea robots that we used for our research and during my search of the building I came across the room in which this robots were kept. Inside the room I saw the robots working on modifying themselves, you know adding limbs and other sorts of attachments.

I'm not sure if it was a result from exposure to the neutron particulars or if there was something else at work, but whatever it was the robot's seemed to have achieved some level of consciousness."

"What, do mean that the robot's or computers started all of this?"

"I'm not sure, all I know is they knew what they were doing and now we're being hunted down and killed like humanity in a form of pestilence."

"But how, how were they able to change without anyone noticing?"

It was something that he had asked himself more than once during the passing years and still he had not really found an answer that he was happy with. "Who knows? Christ we were experimenting with everything and half of the time no one knew what he or she was doing. I'm surprised that it didn't happen sooner to be honest."

It was the best answer that he could give, and the sad fact was that it was probably the truth. Somewhere, before everything was blasted from existence some fool was probably experimenting with artificial intelligence and had managed to create a system that thought for itself.

That machine would have been born with an almost infinite amount of knowledge, but without the ability to recognise the basic difference of right or wrong. You don't go and give a loaded gun to a new-born child.

Seeing the effects that his postulation had on Judith, John decide it was best to return to his tale of survival. He knew from his own experiences that trying to figure out just what went wrong was enough to drive a person insane.

"Anyway I decided that it was best that I leave the building as soon as possible, and armed. I got this from one of our research labs and left to see if I was able to find anyone else. Up till now you're the only person that I've come across.

I actually tried to see if some form of radio communication still worked, but it appears that the storms have a high electrical structure and I was unable to get any messages out."

"So it would appear that we are all that's left."

"I don't think that I'd go that far. I mean if we have managed to survive here surely others must have survived in other countries and when the storms stop"

"Stop," Judith interrupted, anger tinting her voice, "stop. You know just as well as I do how long these storms have been going on. It's not a matter of days, or weeks, we're talking about years. There's no way to know when one's going to hit 'cause they're always coming out of nowhere, and you expect them to stop long enough so that you could cross oceans or large plains of nothingness. You're crazy."

"Maybe I am, god knows this is more than enough to drive anyone insane, but I can't give up. Not after surviving for so long, otherwise I've survived all of this for nothing, if that was true then I would really go insane."

Silence forced its way into the makeshift shelter while outside the storm raged on. Sometimes the storms would last for days, there were other times were it was over within a matter of seconds. By the sound of the activity going on outside it sounded like this one was going to last for a good few hours.

It would be well into the night by the time it was finished, John thought to himself remembering back to a time when you use to be able to tell how long a rain storm would last by the smell that came forth from the greenery around you.

Greenery? Rain?

The two words stuck in his mind, there was something important about them, or the lack of them, but he was unable to remember what it was and there were more important things to worry about. With a shrug of his shoulders he dismissed it from his mind and returned his attention to his guest.

The light danced across her face playing that long forgotten feeling that dwelled inside of him. Images of times past flooded through his mind only to be washed away by a new wave of memories.

"We may as well settle in for the night, by the sounds of things the storm will last for a few hours more and it's not wise to be caught on the streets after dark. You can sleep over there," he stated pointing to the other corner of the room from where his sleeping gear lay. "I have some extra sheets that you can use."

"Wait." Judith raised her head and looked towards him, was it his imagination or did her eyes sparkle for just a second.

"Yes?" he was puzzled by her sudden change of character, it felt almost artificial, but what was reality these days.

"Do you think that I might lie next to you? I miss being with someone, I mean in the same space as someone else and I don't really wish to sleep so far away, not tonight."

There was something to her plea that struck a chord with him. Wasn't he just feeling the same way? All this time he had been on his own and now when he had finally met another person and he was about to banish that person to the opposite corner of the room they now shared.

The moment required no words, the simple nod of his head being capable of voicing a million words. Outstretched arms marked the end of a long drought of loneliness. Together their joined frames lay out on the cold floor, slow rhythmic breathing counting time to inaudible music.

For the first time John Chester Watts truly started to believe that there was hope after all. Perhaps somewhere else on this planet there were other survivors huddled together waiting out the storm's passing, all eagerly awaiting the sun's rise in the morning.

With these thoughts flowing through his mind the night took him on his journey of sleep to dream dreams of what could be.

When he awoke he was only able to assume that it was morning outside, no light being capable of creeping into his abode. One thing that he was certain though was that the storm had passed by and he was hungry.

Judith's head rested on his chest providing a comforting weight and even though neither of them had had the luxury of a proper bath in some time, her scent was still heavenly. He was no longer alone.

He was more than content to lay there with her head peacefully resting on his slowly rising and sinking chest, but his stomach had different thoughts as its protests started to echo with the steel room.

"I guess it's time to get up." Judith half-jokingly stated a singular hand moving to his disgruntle stomach, "Besides I don't think that I'll be able to sleep through that noise."

John started to chuckle at her witticism, only to burst into a roar of laughter as her own stomach joined with his in their urgent request for feeding. Laughter filled the room, both of them relishing the moment of their being together.

"Com'on, I know this great little restaurant just a couple of blocks away."

"Is there somewhere where I can clean up."

"What?" the question had caught him by surprise, personal appearance had not mattered to him after the first few weeks were he had found himself alone. It had also made him question his own outward appearance, a quick brush of his hands confirm at least a fairly decent growth of facial hair making him wonder just how he looked with a beard.

"I don't want to be seen out with what be the last man on earth looking like a mess. What would people say?" Her new bout of humorous remarks unleashed a new round of laughter, the two of them pointing to the various oddities in the others hair or apparel.

"I guess I won't mind cleaning myself up a little either, it might make me

feel a little more civilised. I think I saw somewhere just down the road where there was all sorts of things like razors and hairbrushes"

He marvelled at how well they got on, sure she was slightly outspoken, but still they seemed to share the same sense of ironic humour. It was almost as though they had been made for each other.

"Shall we then."

The ravages of the evening storm was quickly apparent, what had once been nothing more a few small holes in the ceiling above where now large gapping scars, rubble scattered across the tiled floor. Careful they picked their way through the rumble and into the street outside.

Was it his imagination or did the air smell sweeter now, reminisce of the way it would smell after a rain storm, not that that was actually possible but still the fragrance was there. His mind wanted to play with all of the data that it add accumulated concerning the anomalies he had encountered since he had met Judith, but before it had the chance to begin she was pulling at his arm eager to reach this haven that he had told her about.

What the hell, he informed himself, am I really going to argue with all of this, its perfect and if it's too perfect then who really cares. Brushing his unvoiced concerns to the side he responded to Judith's urgent tugs on his arm and they set off down the street.

From within the ruins of one of the numerous buildings across the street red dots peered forth from the darkness intently following the two beings joyful departing to parts unknown. Having seen all it needs to see the dots disappeared back into the darkness, electronic whirring marking their departure.

It wasn't long before they had arrived at their goal, above what was left of the wall the letters " h mis" gave forth no real clues as to the stores previous role in the old society, but somehow John knew that the things that they needed could be found there.

Glass-less frames guarded the entrance to what had once been a meeting place for a number of people, each of them consumed with the quest of creating a physically better image of themselves. Where were all of those people now, John wondered. Funny how all of those things which were once so important were now creating the glue to whole him together mentally.

Plaster exploded from the wall to the left of the frames and then to the right as tiny beams of light crackled in the morning air. Fresh blast rang out and John heard Judith cry out in pain, he could smell the burning of her flesh as single beam of light forced itself through her.

Her pierced form suddenly robbed of life, slumped to the cold ground underfoot, the laughter which had once come from her lips replaced with a final rattle of death, each breath given up only after a long fight. A charred hole marked the exiting point of her life force.

Red and angry rage cloud across John vision, blocking out all signs of his once clear thinking replacing it with the animal need for vengeance. His actions slowed down in his mind, the images playing like a slide show presentation.

"NO"

He could hear himself cry out at what had happened, almost see himself responding in some disembodied manner. Hands flailed at his side in search for his armament which wasn't there, instead it lay safe inside the room that was his home, forgotten in the moment of joy that he had shared with the lifeless form that now lay at his feet.

Unarmed, thought not defused John turn to rush his assailants. Another tight stream of light broke forth as he turned ripping into his side, damaged flesh quickly fusing under the intensity of the heat from the beam stopping the flow of vital fluids before it even started.

It can't end this way he thought to himself pain tearing at his mind as he continued to make his way towards the now visible attackers. Their metal bodies' shinning in the new day's sunlight, red eyes burning with an evil which was unintelligible to him.

Two more beams broke forth the sidearms carried by the two robots, each one leaving behind its mark upon his now battered form. The air was now filled with the putrid smell of burnt flesh as John lost part of his right shoulder and left thigh.

Unconsciousness knocked at John's mind, threatening to take him away with it. Not yet, he tried to instruct himself, not yet, got to take at least one of the bastards with me.

Another round of beams racked his body, surgically removing his legs at the knee joints. The momentum of his movements carried his upper torso forward as his now lifeless legs fell, abandoned to one side.

Fresh beams racked his body and the blackness which had threaten him once before stole him away. As the darkness enveloped him he started to laugh at the irony of the situation, his madding laughter echoing in the otherwise quiet street.

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His mind drifted in the darkness that surrounded a sense of bodiless prevailing over all other senses. So this is what it's like to be dead, he thought to himself, a bit on the dull side really.

The moment of weightlessness started to pass and newer feelings started to assert themselves upon his consciousness. Something was wrong, this can't be death it doesn't feel right, his mind interjected somehow feeling robbed of its new experience.

Tiny specks of formless light started to break up the otherwise perfectly black sheet that was covering his eyesight. Dulled senses started to return feedback to his somewhat clouded mind.

"Simulation terminated nineteen hundred hours." boomed forth a metallic voice, from parts unseen.

Simulation?

What's going?

Where am I?

Questions pushed themselves forward into his thoughts new ones replacing still unanswered ones only to be replaced themselves seconds later. Panic

gripped him while senses that should not exist continued to provide him with information about his surroundings.

A new, yet somehow familiar sensation alerted him to pressure being applied to both the bridge of his nose and his ears. It wasn't uncomfortable just alien in its making.

Sharp pain shot through his left arm. Wasn't it my right arm where I was shot, he quizzed himself as he tried desperately to assimilate what was going on. Parts of it were coming back but he needed to be sure that what he thought to be the truth was so.

"How long?" he croaked, his parched throat scraping the words out. Strange that it was so dry, after all he was certain that he had something to drink only a manner of hours ago.

"Fourteen months, three days and nineteen hours." stated the automated voice in a matter of fact manner.

Somewhere his mind was ready for the answer and was busily filing away the information that he had just received. Elsewhere the information had only managed to cause even more reasons for him to panic. Torn between the two lines of thought he decided to start with the basics and then work it out from there.

His name was John Chester Watts that was fact number one. Fact number two he was a survivor from some sort of bombing that had taken part on the surface. Number three he was a scientist, he and his team were to be responsible for the creation of a space colony.

That was how he had survived, he was in the underground test laboratory when it happened. He had continued to survive due to the fact that the lab was set up to imitate a colony right to the smallest detail, meaning that he had fresh water and food supplies.

The colony was maintained by a robotic work force, which was greatly different to the ones that he had come across in the simulation. Somehow he had the feeling that they had not be responsible for the events that had laid waste to planet's surface.

Recovering eyesight provided him with visual confirmation to his somewhat patchy memory. On a small table in front of him lay a keyboard, next to it a small screen that was frozen in place at the image of his being shot an event that to him had seemed so real. It hadn't been real though, that was what all of this equipment, the suit that he now wore instead of the tattered clothes from moments ago was for, had ensured that it was real. This was a V.R. System.

All of what had taken place had done so in a virtual reality world, a world that he had created so that he would feel so alone. The pain in his left arm had been nothing more than the drip, which had provided him with all of his nourishment during his immersion in the virtual reality he had created. It wasn't the only memory to return either memories of past attempts to create an artificial happiness cluttered his mind.

He had created these worlds because it had been either that or go mad. There was no one else for him to share his good fortune with, he was the only survivor from the entire human race.

Outside fierce storms raped the dusty surface of what had once been a

beautiful planet. They had done their jobs thoroughly, the people who had created the bomb, for it had destroyed all life and left the buildings standing. Every living thing was gone, from the small microbe to the largest giant that had once stalked smaller prey. Not even a single blade of grass had been spared, except for himself. He had managed to survive through pure dumb luck.

He didn't what to think about it anymore, he didn't what all of it to catch up with him again, he wanted only to escape.

Reaching out he grabbed the key and started to modify screens of code that had replaced the previously frozen image. He had to get it right this time. This time he didn't want to come back.

He could always create a simple reality, one where the world had not come to an end, but instead he always created a reality where he was survivor that way he felt that he was able to justify his having survived what had really occurred. That way it would have been all for nothing.

"Computer start simulation." he commanded placing the keyboard back where it had came from and prepared himself for his arrival in the V.R. world that he had created this time.

"Simulation number twenty-two initiated. Count down to immersement started. Ten, nine eight." the artificial voice count down without emotions, not really aware of it environment, not like John Chester Watts.

To it this was nothing more that lines of computer code coming together to create a game, after all that had been its design, while to John this was all there was to him, this was the only way that he might ever achieve happiness.

"Three, two, one, program initiated."

Everything went black yet again as the V.R. glasses prepared themselves for the optic display that it was about to feed John. In the blackness John Chester Watts uttered a singular pray to deities unknown.

Don't let me come back this time.

The world exploded in a fireball of colours and John Chester Watts no longer lived in his true reality, wherever that was.

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