



AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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in English presented on December 16, 2017

Title: Maintenance Men: An Original Fiction Manuscript and Analysis of Anthropocene Fears in Post-Apocalyptic Literature and Comics

Abstract approved: \_\_\_\_\_

This thesis consists of a critical foreword and an original manuscript of fiction. The foreword presents speculative fiction and comics as literary forms that explore social issues, particularly issues of labor and socioeconomic class and their relationship to environmental resources. The foreword examines several Anthropocene fears explored in the post-apocalyptic speculative fiction of Ursula LeGuin's "Nine Lives" and Richard Bachman/Stephen King's *Running Man*, noting that these same fears are also explored in the post-apocalyptic speculative comics of Jonathan Hickman's *East of West* and Rick Remender's *Tokyo Ghost*. The original fiction manuscript, "Maintenance Men," is contextualized within this discussion as a post-apocalyptic speculative text that engages in social critique.

KEYWORDS: Anthropocene, Post-Apocalyptic, Speculative Fiction, Comic Books,

Maintenance Men: An Original Fiction Manuscript and Analysis of Anthropocene Fears  
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A Thesis Presented to  
The Department of English, Modern Languages, and Journalism  
Emporia State University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Masters of Arts

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by  
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December 2017

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Approved by the Department Chair

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## Acknowledgements

Thank you to my committee for overseeing this project and providing insights that greatly aided in the completion of this project, Professor Amy Sage Webb, my committee chair; Dr. Rachelle Smith, and Dr. Kevin Rabas. Professor Webb's guidance has given me opportunities to explore fiction in new ways and allowed me to expand my research and writing into the world of comic books. Dr. Rachelle Smith helped establish a love of gothic literature and fantasy which continues to influence my writing. Dr. Kevin Rabas support and constant encouragement to explore poetry and its applications in fiction has inspired me to explore both poetry and fiction in new ways.

Finally, thank you to my parents, Steve and Suzanne Shandy. Your constant support throughout my life, the instilling of a great work ethic early on in life, and allowing me to come to Kansas and find my own path made this project possible in more ways than one.

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## Post-World War II Speculative Fiction and Comics, the Anthropocene, and Technology

Speculative Fiction is a large genre of literature that speculates about human life, science, and technology. In the modern era, post-apocalyptic literature speculates on four specific items common to the modern Anthropocene era: population growth, rising pollution, the creation of corporate governments, and the commodification of humans. Speculative literature, as a genre, explores many possible futures and a vast number of possibilities. Post-Apocalyptic Speculative Literature is focused on speculating what the world might be like after an apocalyptic event. Works that have been written in the genre often utilize the time period in which it is written to speculate on the future. Four literary works that show speculative futures in the Post-apocalyptic genre are Ursula K. Le Guin's work "Nine Lives," Stephen King's novel *The Running Man*, Rick Remender's comic *Tokyo Ghost*, and Johnathan Hickman's comic *East of West*. Each of these works speculates on the Anthropocene fears of their time and use them in varying degrees while emphasizing a particular fear or anxiety. "Nine Lives" was written in the midst of the Green Revolution and in the same year as the controversial book, *The Population Bomb*, which focused on the population outgrowing available food supplies. *The Running Man* speculates on the effects of nuclear war with the Soviet Union during the Cold War. *Tokyo Ghost* and *East of West* speculate on possible futures filled with martial law, pollution, and corporate governments. Post-Apocalyptic Fiction uses the Anthropocene to define the futures found in the text.

The Anthropocene is "The era of geological time during which human activity is considered to be the dominant influence on the environment, climate, and ecology of the earth" (Anthropocene, n). What makes the Anthropocene concept interesting is that it is a

science interested in the future according to Noel Castree, a professor at the University of Wollongong, Australia in the Department of Geography & Sustainable Communities. She states, “though the Anthropocene refers to ongoing global biophysical changes, it caught the attention of geologists from 2007. This is remarkable because earth science is typically concerned with the deep past, not the present (let alone the future)” (Castree 237). The Anthropocene does not fit into standard Earth Science concepts because it is concerned with present issues and issues that could arise in the future due to human activity making it a category of its own. Anthropocene Discourse accepts human dominance over nature as current reality and speculates that human technological innovation will be the key to resolving environmental issues without causing major changes to human behavior or lifestyle. The primary reason for the planet becoming destitute in the post-apocalyptic genre is because of humankind’s abuse and consuming of the resources available in great quantity or fight over what is left reducing the available resources even further. Humans, in post-apocalyptic literature, often live an extractive lifestyle in the hopes of establishing a higher standard of living for all people. The extractive lifestyle that people live in these works often mirrors the real world in some way.

The extractive market culture is assumed to be necessary for higher quality of life and requires divisions in socio-economic classes so that each respective socio-economic class can have a higher standard of living. The development of human cities and technology places immense stress on the environment. As such, humans become an extra factor when it comes to geological processes. Human technological development changes the environment in many ways such as increased emissions from cars and factories, the



removal of animal habitat for developments of various kinds, and deforestation. The results of these actions are what the post-apocalyptic genre seeks to speculate about. The cultural narratives surrounding the Anthropocene are distinctly apocalyptic often portraying a worst-case scenario (Taylor 5). The Anthropocene is distinctly apocalyptic because post-apocalyptic fiction takes Anthropocene issues and escalates them beyond the current levels. The Anthropocene era contains four distinct issues that Post-Apocalyptic Fiction often speculates on: overpopulation and famine, over-industrialization, the creation of toxic environments, and the rise totalitarian type regimes. These issues came to the forefront of Post-Apocalyptic Speculative Fiction after the end of World War II.

The Second World War helped to further apocalyptic scenarios in literature as humanity became the focus and focal cause of the apocalypse. The destruction and suffering caused by the war made it easier to envision humans as the cause of the apocalypse. James Berger, a senior lecturer in English and American Studies at Yale, states “the second World war helped inspire different apocalyptic perspectives. In representations after the Second World War, the apocalypse became, to a much greater degree, a matter of retrospection” (Berger 389-390). While the envisioned apocalypse was caused by outside forces in the early days of the genre, the apocalyptic came closer to home after the Second World War because humanity became the agents of their own destruction. The focus shifted because of the devastation caused by various acts of systematic murder, other atrocities, and most significantly, the Atom Bombs, forced the perspective to change. This made it easier for people and authors of the following years to envision what an apocalypse could be, adding a new dimension to the Post-

Apocalyptic Literature genre. Prior to these events, humanity was very rarely the focus of the apocalypse's cause. Humanity's potential for destruction and ruin gave way to humans dominating the genre as the primary candidates for the ruined worlds portrayed in Post-Apocalyptic literature. Since humanity became the focal point of the apocalypse, the genre must look at aspects of humanity that could cause the apocalypse. More often than not, humanity's extractive culture is used as the beginning and penultimate cause of apocalyptic events seen in the genre.

Post-Apocalyptic works written after World War II tend to explore the extractive culture that humans create. These literary works explore humanity's potential to change the natural environment, often using distant futures that offer little hope for humanity's immediate future. The changes that humans create most often in these works are exploding populations, pollution of the natural world, the rise of a totalitarian government that controls what remains of the natural world via corporations, and the commodification of the lower social classes. These social issues have become the most common causes of apocalyptic events. Each of these requires humans to extract more resources from the natural world which, in turn, causes further problems as available resources become much scarcer. This scarcity leads to humanity relying heavily upon technology to either locate new resources in outer space or to extend usability of the resources that are available to the populace.

Technology permeates every aspect of life in these works, and it is often a boon and a detriment because technological advances create conveniences and make life easier for humans, but it can also add to the issues already present. Technology becomes the basis of the societies in these works in various ways. "Nine Lives" uses technology to fix

diseases to have a larger workforce and to produce the clones that help in replenishing the genepool. *The Running Man* uses technology to produce a tainted environment that causes mass cases of respiratory illness. *Tokyo Ghost* uses technology as a source of contention and as the ultimate savior of humanity. *East of West* utilizes technology in a limited manner but shows it to be the absolute salvation for Native American tribes and the destruction of the other nations. Technological innovation allows for humanity to thrive or survive in these works. Le Guin's "Nine Lives," Stephen King's *The Running Man*, Rick Remender's *Tokyo Ghost*, and Johnathan Hickman's *East of West* speculate on these issues and are a few of many works within the genre that show speculative futures based in the Anthropocene era.

### **Overpopulation and Famine**

"Nine Lives" is a novelette that was published in *Playboy Magazine* in 1968 that takes place inside a mining base on the arid and barren asteroid Libra. In it, two men, Martin and Pugh, lead an operation to mine ore from the asteroid using a mining team made up of human clones. The primary interactions in the story take place between Martin, Pugh, and the clone team of John Chow, a tenclone made up of both male and female clones. In the story, clones have been produced to aid in the replenishment of the human gene pool after famines and diseases have reduced the human population on Earth to critical levels. The story speculates that the explosion of the population overwhelmed available food resources and the resulting famines wiped out the majority of earth's population. In this apocalyptic scenario, the famines that swept across the globe lead to the restriction of many life-giving supplies and resources by government officials in order to preserve the little that remains. "Nine Lives" briefly mentions the famines in a

conversation between Pugh and Martin. Martin gives the background of how the United Kingdom survived the famines by saying, “The United Kingdom had come through the Great Famines well, losing less than half its population: a record achieved by rigorous food control” (Le Guin 934). This is the first mention of earth’s plights in the story. Later on in the story, it is discussed that the Irish and Ireland itself were wiped out by the Great Famines. Pugh tells the clone, Zayin, about the extinction of the Irish, “No more Irish. A couple thousand in all the island, the last I knew. They didn’t go for birth control, you know, so the food ran out. By the Third Famine, there were no Irish left at all but the priesthood, and they’re all celibate, or nearly all” (Le Guin 938). The earth of “Nine Lives” has become a place where food and natural resources are incredibly scarce, resulting in the need for intense rationing. The famines on earth functioned as one of the major catastrophes that led to the need for the cloning programs. The famines and overpopulation of earth in the story derive from the dominant international crisis of overpopulation in 1968. This problem was explained and defined by the book *The Population Bomb*.

The Population Bomb was written by Dr. Paul R. Erlich a professor of Population Studies at Stanford University. In the book, Dr. Erlich examines the rapid growth of the human population in America and around the world stating, “[the human population] doubled once every thousand years or so. [...] The doubling time at present seems to be about 35 years” (Erlich 4). Erlich points out that the growth of the human population on earth is happening far too quickly for available food resources to keep up with. Erlich further states that “the United States shipped one quarter of its wheat crop, nine million tons, to India” (Erlich 19). This creates the primary source for the speculations found in

Le Guin's work about the decimation of the human race in the story. Earth's population increased exponentially and the United States gave away one quarter of its wheat to a developing country with a larger population than the US. The anxiety about famine due to rapid population growth in 1965 helped to produce a speculative future where humanity is decimated by food shortages and have been forced to flee into space to locate resources to sustain the regrown population. Similar problems occur in Remender's *Tokyo Ghost* comic. However, food is even harder to find outside of injectable nutrients.

*Tokyo Ghost* is a comic series with ten issues and was published by Image Comics Company in 2015. In *Tokyo Ghost*, the world has been devastated by a third world war and the remaining human populations have been forced into large cities. A large population of Americans is centered inside the country of Los Angeles as a result of the war. *Tokyo Ghost*, as a Post-Apocalyptic work, shows famine in the form of the IV bags and cannibalism. The massive population of Los Angeles in the novel leads to food shortages so great that much of the population must rely on much more savage means of survival in some cases while others rely on food nutrients put inside IV bags. The lack of food is so prevalent that the poorest of the people often become cannibalistic as shown when one of the main characters, Led, throws a dead body into a crowd of poor people and they cannibalize the body while his partner, Debbie, believes that they have done an act of charity for those people (Remender, "The Atomic Garden"). For many, available food comes in an IV bag and is directly injected into the blood stream. The food is processed down into the base nutrients and given out for people to simply inject their meals as actual food is too scarce to go around (Remender, "The Atomic Garden"). *Tokyo Ghost* treats food shortages as a way of life for the people of Los Angeles. The

population simply lives with the fact that most of their food is injected, not digested. For the populations of Los Angeles in the story, the lack of food is common and they have accepted that their food comes in IV bags and they do not question why that is. The use of the IV bags enables the population size to remain large with little hindrance to what food resources are still available which in turn allows the problem to continue because there are so many people to feed that some must cannibalize others to have a meal.

Famine is also portrayed differently in King's novel *The Running Man*. The population size in Stephen King's *The Running Man* presents similar problems and speculations.

Stephen King, writing as Richard Bachman, wrote and published *The Running Man* novel in 1982. Instead of food shortages, *The Running Man* uses population control to show that there may not be enough food for everyone. While there is not really an explicit mention of rationing being in place, the lack of food and the thinly veiled eugenics scheme put on display a population that has increased to the point that methods of population control have become necessary. The primary conduit for the population issue comes from the jobs that the lower-classes of people must do to survive. The main character, Ben Richards, had to be what is called an Engine Wiper for six years to provide for his family.

An Engine Wiper is a job that sterilizes the person working because of the massive amounts of radiation and the use of radiation shields that are mostly ineffective (King 200). Richards "quit his job in 2018 because the chances of having children decreased with every shift he spent behind the leaky G-A old style lead shields" (King 200). The sterilization that results from this work is a thinly veiled population control method that lowers the number of children that lower class people can have. This is

further demonstrated by Richard's neighbor, Jimmy Laughlin, who held the same job. Laughlin states, "Well I'm alive, anyway. According to those maggots, that's all that counts. I'm sterile, of course. *That* don't matter. That's one of the little risks you run for the princely sum of seven New Bucks a day" (King 59-60). The low pay is enough to sustain the lifestyles of those in the lower classes, but the price they pay in the long run is that they will be unable to have children. This inability to have children is how the government keeps the population under control because of the food shortage. The food shortage is further demonstrated inside of Richards' neighborhood in the novel.

There is an apparent food shortage within Richard's neighborhood so that some people seek food as compensation for work. The novel makes note of the midwife who delivered Richards' daughter, "delivered by a midwife from down the block who took fifty cents and four cans of beans" (King 202). This shows how desperate for food some of the residents are in Richards' neighborhood. The midwife asked for beans instead of monetary compensations. The novel only makes note of her, however, there is a strong possibility that she is not the only one who has to do this. *The Running Man* speculates on issues of forced sterilization for people below a certain income because they do not have desirable traits to be passed on or the people in charge do not want to deal with out of control population growth in city slums. Food shortages in Johnathan Hickman's *East of West* are treated as a source of contention and uprising instead of a way of life.

*East of West* is an ongoing comic book series that was first published in 2013 by Image Comics Company. In *East of West*, the United States, known as The Union, is the primary conduit for the lack of food in relation to the size of the population. The Union already has energy rationing in effect, meaning that the people cannot use electricity or

other public utilities during certain periods of time as a way to compensate for the amount of consumption in relation to the size of the population. The President is eventually forced to implement food rationing as the available food supplies can no longer sustain the current population levels. The food rationing causes massive riots, as does the extended energy rationing. The masses in The Union have begun to run low on vital resources because of the destitute nature of the planet. A meteor smashed into the earth making it a mostly desert planet with little left for farming or water. The exact size of the United States in terms of numbers and food supply seems reasonably clear as the president instituted food rationing based on the fact that the population outnumbers what is available. She states, “The recently instituted energy rationing will continue for the foreseeable future and we are also implementing both food rationing and public-sector furloughs” (Hickman, “The Street is Burning”). This is where the fear of food shortage comes into focus. The establishing of food rationing leads to massive riots and the organized targeting of government people and buildings. The lack of food plays to the fear of a country tearing itself apart over government control of resources for distribution.

*East of West* takes a slightly different approach to this issue as the other three works portray societies that have progressed with food shortages for a long while. The Union starts at the beginning of the rationing phases and highlights the immediacy of the turmoil involved food shortage. The need for rationing causes massive riots and demonstrations forcing the president to implement martial law. The implementation of martial law allowed her to begin population control by having anyone on the streets after curfew systematically executed. The speculation in the comic shows what America could possibly become should food begin to run out because of increasing populations.



The Anthropocene fear of overpopulation allows the representation of possible futures where the people suffer any number of consequences. In “Nine Lives” the consequences of such overpopulation are mass famines leading to human extinction and the need for cloning to replenish the population. For *The Running Man*, the population size required thinly veiled sterilization of the lower class and the need to seek food as compensation. The people in *Tokyo Ghost* must inject food into their bodies instead of eating solid food while also having to live under strict rationing for solid food and drinkable water. In *East of West*, the lack of food leads to social unrest and political upheaval as The Union and the government tears itself apart. Post-Apocalyptic works focus on this fear in different ways while also showing varying consequences. Though these four novels treat this issue in similar and different ways each novel uses this as a jump off point into the creation of toxic environments.

### **Toxic Environments**

Due to the massive population increases, the worlds represented in these works become toxic environments in various ways. In “Nine Lives,” the fact that Martin, Pugh, and the John Chow tenclone are mining on an asteroid for ore suggests that planet Earth no longer has the capability to produce oil or other fuel types. Also, the famines resulting from the exploding populations have left the planet decimated to the point that it may not be possible to produce food and water easily. The planet Libra is described as, “alive inside but dead on the outside, her face a black and dun net of wrinkles, tumors, cracks. She was bald and blind” (Le Guin 932). The surface of the asteroid presents a major issue for Martin, Pugh, and the tenclone to deal with. The massive amounts of toxicity present

require the exploit team to wear specialized suits to protect them from the fumes present and to have an enclosed air system requiring replaceable tanks similar to a scuba diver (Le Guin 940). The toxic environment that Martin, Pugh, and the tenclone must endure is the result of the diminishing resources on Earth. They had to be sent into space to locate places like Libra so that Earth can continue to thrive. The lack of these resources forced humanity to go into space in search of resources that were once readily available on Earth in order to keep Earth's infrastructure afloat and keep industry and exploration efforts stable. The extensive need of resources leads to a boom in industry and the use of factories for the production of goods. While "Nine Lives" uses mining on a toxic planet to demonstrate an extensive need for resources, *The Running Man* uses industry to show the results of overusing factories for the production of goods leading to the toxic and polluted air in the novel.

The need for energy and the exploitation of fuel through industry and the consequences thereof are taken to a new extreme in *The Running Man* because the planet earth is center stage for the toxic environment. The pollution and radiation being leaked into the earth's atmosphere are extensive enough that it harms the people of the lower classes because they develop respiratory illnesses at a much higher rate. The lower-class citizens have the highest rate of asthma in the nation because they only have access to cheap filters which are ineffective at combatting the airborne pollution. Bradley, an acquaintance, and helper of Richards in the novel states, "When Cassie boots off, you think they will put cancer on the death certificate? Shit, they'll put asthma. Else somebody might get scared. Somebody might kife a library card and find out lung cancer is up seven hundred percent since 2015" (King 171). The filters that the lower-class

people use are wholly ineffective against the pollution and are only meant to be a placebo that brings false peace of mind (King 170). The devastating amount of pollution that is being spewed by the factories can only be counteracted by a filter that costs roughly six thousand dollars which is something that only the richest can afford (King 170).

Overdevelopment has altered the planet's air, making it unsafe to breath without a nose filter. The industrialization of the United States may be the primary cause of the pollution but the radiation and pollution play to a different fear altogether: nuclear annihilation.

*The Running Man* was written in the midst of the Cold War, and the fears existing from the threat of nuclear war and weapons were incredibly high. *The Running Man* novel projects the Anthropocene-era fear of a nuclear holocaust as radiation is a primary component of both the novel's pollution and the fallout from an atomic weapon. King instead uses a much more familiar aspect of everyday life to speculate on the effects of atomic annihilation through the use of factories, as factories would have been a much more familiar concept to the common person as Nuclear Arms are not immediately visible to the general public. The factories in the novel pollute the air very quickly due to either sheer numbers of factories or that they operate all hours of the day and night. The pollution that is presented in *The Running Man* is taken to similar levels in *Tokyo Ghost* because this work also uses factories to speculate on the creation of a toxic environment.

The environment that is presented in *Tokyo Ghost* is so toxic that it became impossible to do many things in the outdoors because of the exposure to extreme amounts of smog, other air pollutants, rain, and ground water in general. The main character, Debbie, states that the water in Los Angeles is "so toxic it'd melt your skin off" (Remender, "The Atomic Garden"). Even the water that runs through the city's sewers

can kill if not avoided. The water that is pumped into schools and offices is filtered and purified extensively and even then, it may not be entirely safe to consume. The only sources of truly clean water are found in the areas that house the richest people, who have water running in aqueducts and small rivers for viewing pleasure (Remender, “The Atomic Garden”). The panels of the graphic novel show that the environment is simply concrete, metal, factories, high rises, and large apartment buildings. The landscape is covered in a nearly perpetual darkness because the sun is blocked by the factory smoke and leaves the city under cloud cover all hours of the day and night. The only sources of light available outside of a building are advertisements, fires, spotlights, vehicle headlights, and streetlamps. The lack of natural sunlight is called to attention when Led and Debbie arrive in Japan. Led looks up, sees the sun, and asks “What is that?” (Remender, “The Atomic Garden”). The image of industry portrayed in this work demonstrates the Anthropocene fear about the human impact on the planet. The comic’s depiction of factories and similar entities focuses on modern day concerns about factory smoke and pollutants to new levels projecting the possibility of living in an environment like the one found in the comic should the factories be completely unregulated. The Isles of Los Angeles are considered the pinnacle of human achievement and engineering in the comic’s world showing that human achievements could lead to a future similar to *Tokyo Ghost*.

Each of these works takes Anthropocene-era fears about industry and speculates on the consequences of industrial development if it is unregulated. “Nine Lives” uses another planet to illustrate the need for resources to continue industrial practices by making it so that planet Earth no longer capable of sustaining industry on its own. *The*

*Running Man* uses factories and industry to create an environment where people are more susceptible to respiratory illness without the use of air filters for both indoor living and being outside. In *Tokyo Ghost*, the planet is covered in perpetual smog that allows little to no sunlight to enter, creating a world plunged into perpetual darkness. Moreover, the massive amounts of industry and the substantial lack of food and water aid in the rise of a totalitarian system of governance that controls the few resources available.

### **Totalitarian/Corporate Government**

The government system in “Nine Lives” functions as a specter in the story, yet the system that the people of earth are ruled by are clear. The government of earth is a singular entity that controls the major aspects of the people’s lives, including Martin, Pugh, and the John Chow Tenclone. The first instance of the country based governments being absorbed by a singular worldwide government is shown in a conversation between Martin and Pugh as they discussed the food shortages. (Le Guin 934). The story speculates that the rationing, famines, and the loss of most of the population led to a global government taking over the separate national government systems. Pugh states, “Back before the Famines when Earth had national governments, they talked about that: clone your best soldiers, have whole regiments of them. But the food ran out before they could play that game” (Le Guin 940). It is clear that the governments hold power in many aspects of people’s lives on earth. What remains unclear though is whether or not the rationing policies are still in effect. One thing that is clear about the government of earth is that it creates clones, which are grown in tanks at great expense monetarily and at great expense of other resources. Also, they use the cells of deceased people to do this, which

can raise serious ethical concerns about the proper treatment of the dead. The government controls the availability of clone work forces and controls their lives by sending them to remote places in the galaxy to mine for supplies. What forms of social rights or human rights that the clones possess is unclear; however, the clones in “Nine Lives” appear to be somewhat apathetic too much outside of their own work or existence. This apathy is shown when the John Chow clones do not care to get to know Pugh or Owen, but instead simply want to get down to business to fulfill their purposes at the station, “At breakfast, a John said, “Now if you will brief us, Captain Pugh...Owen, we can work out our schedule. Anything new on the mine since your last report to your Mission?” (Le Guin 934). Prior to this, Pugh was trying to get to know the clones, but they essentially ignored him and wanted to carry on with the work that they were sent there to do.

The totalitarian nature of the governments may not be explicitly explored in the story, but the actions of the clones show a form of subordination to Martin and Pugh outside of the obvious boss and worker relationship. The clones are on Libra to do the work that they were literally created for. The present subordination’s origin is hinted at in an assumption made by Pugh in the story. “Clones must be trained, to meet questions, to reassure, and reason” (Le Guin 934). The training involved for the tenclone’s intense reasoning and reassurances about their abilities are in question here, because the clones at this point have not shown any true differences in personality or thought. As such, they appear as machines bred for the sole purpose of working and nothing else. What this says about the government that is in charge of the cloning programs is that the government does not see the clones as “proper humans” but is instead a subordinate species showing that the Earth government has taken the ultimate authority over deciding who gets to be

“human” and who is considered an expendable resource. Martin and Pugh act as the tenclone’s governing figure creating a control system that goes beyond the traditional worker and boss relationship. The totalitarian control of the government is utilized differently in King’s *The Running Man* as the government is a game show network.

The government in Stephen King’s *The Running Man* is an interesting entity, as it is dominated by the Games Federation, which functions as both entertainer and agency. The Games Federation is in charge of the majority of the government systems as the contextual information leads the reader to the conclusion that the Games Federation and its extensions are the last piece of government left in the world. The Games Federation is allowed to continue its control over the lives of the lower-classes and the spreading of misinformation through its news organizations. The totalitarian system in *The Running Man* does not come in the form of controlling all of the people’s lives, but through silencing dissidents in the form of a game, controlling public opinion, and controlling the information that is given out to the public for their knowledge. Killian, the executive producer of The Running Man game, states “The program is one of the surest ways the Network has of getting rid of embryo troublemakers such as yourself Mr. Richards... To date, we have no survivals. To be brutally honest, we expect to have none” (King 66).

This is one of the clearest examples of totalitarianism in the novel, as Killian admits that the Running Man game is meant to be used as entertainment for the masses but also a warning for the rebellious. The game involves someone being declared an enemy of the state and forced to run and survive for thirty days for one-hundred new Dollars per hour with a grand prize of one billion New Dollars should Richards survive for the full thirty days (King 67). Richards is a dissident and a troublemaker in this novel

and that idea is made very clear early in the novel during his psychological evaluation when he volunteers to be examined for one of the games. The unnamed doctor that reads the results of Richards' mental exam states, "In short, you are regarded as antiauthoritarian and anti-social. You're a deviate who has been intelligent enough to stay out of prison and serious trouble with the government, and you're not hooked on anything (King 65). Within this quote is an assumption that Richards is unusually smart for his social class. This makes Richards a primary candidate to participate in Running Man because his death in The Running Man contest would be symbolic of crushing deviates that do not conform to the way society is currently constructed. The control of the Games Federation is further cemented by their ability to sway public opinion easily. The pregame interview shows that Killian hosts are used as a method to sway public opinion against Richards before he starts. Killian does this by altering photos of him and his family. When his picture was shown to the audience it notes, "It had been retouched, Richards thought, to make his eyes deeper, his forehead a little lower, his cheeks more shadowed. His mouth had been given a jeering, curled expression by some technico's airbrush" (King 91). The alteration of his own photo was done to give the audience both in the studio and those watching at home the impression that Richards is not a man down on his luck trying to save his daughter and wife from their poverty, but a man who is rough and almost evil. The Games Federation did the same to images of Richards' wife to make her look disheveled and wanting (King 92). This was done to the picture of Richards' wife for the same reason it was done to him, so the public would turn against her. This influence is made absolute by the promise of money to any civilian who sees him and reports it to the Games Federation. The interviewer states to the general public



that, “A verified sighting brings you one hundred New Dollars! A sighting which results in a kill results in one-thousand New Dollars for *you!*” (King 91-92). The promise of money and the alterations made to the pictures swayed the public against him in such a way that not only threatened his life but also the lives of his wife and daughter to great effect resulting in their murder one day after he began the game (King 373). Not only does The Games Federation attempt to silence Richards’ dissidence, but they also play a role in the murder of Richard’s family.

The Games Federation keeps its grip on the public through shaping opinions and silencing dissidents both quietly and in public spectacle. The control of information is a critical aspect of the Games Federations control over the populace. How much information the Games Federation controls is unclear for the most part. However, there is one aspect in the control of information that they hide and censor heavily; the amount of pollution in the air. The pollution in the air is devastating, and the Games Federation does not want that information getting out because it could shut down the factories and stop major elements of industrial production. This control of information is shown when Richards is talking to Bradley, a man who was helping him. During their conversation Richards asks how long it has been since the weather had included the pollution count in the reports to which Bradley responded, “Not since 2020 in Boston, they’re scared to [...] When it got up to twelve, the factories and all of the pollution-producing shit had to shut down till the weather changed. It was federal law until 1987, when the Revised Congress rolled it back” (King 168-169). The control of the populace through spreading misinformation is prevalent here because not even Richards knew how bad the pollution truly was until he got out into other parts of the United States during the game. The

Games Federation's control over the flow of information is vital to their success as a government and entertainment giant because if the people knew the truth, there would be social upheaval and revolts. Totalitarian governmental tendencies are shown in *Tokyo Ghost* and *East of West* as well.

The government in *Tokyo Ghost* is very different in form as the government is at its core a gang operation and drug running scheme. The people are addicted to a nano-tech drug that allows for digital highs and access to anything cloud or web-based. This addiction allows for the government of business and technological tycoon, Mr. Flak, to flourish, and it allows him to subtly control the lives of the people in the Isles of Los Angeles. Mr. Flak controls everything relating to entertainment, technology, food, manufacturing, maintenance, and building projects. The war for technology mentioned in the graphic novel was the driving force behind the extensive technological innovations made allowing for robotics to advance and take over nearly all forms of manual labor. The graphic novel speculates on the use of technology to force out human labor as the primary method for Flak's rise to power. The fear of industrial advances would allow a single person or entity to become immensely powerful. Flak's government is overt in its control of the people and extremely apathetic to it. Mr. Flack sees his control of society as giving the masses a distraction from their problems and giving them everything that they want. He even says this himself as he is confronted briefly by the main character, Debbie. Flak justifies his rule by saying:

Robotics do the farming, mining, manufacturing, construction—everything. Left an unemployed population with a lot of free time. So, I keep them entertained. [... ] I gave them each their own channel, told them what they wanted to hear---I

make them comfortable. [...] When human life became worthless, I gave it **Value**  
[...] Consumption gives human life meaning. (Remender, “The Atomic Garden”).

Mr. Flak clearly believes himself to be a savior of humanity because he believes that he gave the lives of the masses meaning again. However, Flak does not use the word “meaning” he uses the word “value.” This suggests that Flak sees each person’s life in terms of monetary value and does not see their lives as worth more than what they are willing to pay him for their next high. He gives the people the things they want to hear, see, and eat. Flak does not give them the truth or factual information; he simply shows them what they want to see. Another example of how much control he has over the populace is the news cycle claiming that global warming is not caused by humans. The anchor states “98% of Americans deny humans are responsible for climate change, finally hip to scientists’ profit-driven lies” (Remender, “The Atomic Garden”). The contrast between the reality and the words in this statement are stark in the graphic novel. Flak has gained control over the smallest aspects of people’s lives to the extent that he has been able to control the opinions of people with little actual effort through his nano-tech drugs. He keeps his control even more absolute by his use of enforcers that have been enhanced by his nano-tech. He uses them to remove threats to his empire and to silence dissidence. This is shown when he sends his best enforcer to destroy a small band of rebels who hijack some of the broadcast signals to spread their message about Flak’s lies (Remender, “Come Join Us”). As such, he becomes a silent tyrant because he uses his nano-tech drugs to distract from the violence that his police utilize and the policies that he has enacted. This shows that he is a shrewd leader because his public image is upheld, but beneath the surface, he is ruling with an iron fist. The government of The

Union in *East of West* lacks Mr. Flak's cleverness but utilizes many of the same methods shortly after the president has to implement martial law.

The government of The Union in *East of West* does not have Flak's shrewdness, but the totalitarian control of the people's lives is evident. When the focus on The Union comes into a clearer sphere is well after The Union devolves into a chaotic state. However, the President uses speeches and the army to control the people during the unrest eventually resorting to systematic extermination to quell the unrest. The totalitarian state of the Union government is the most explicit example of a totalitarian state because the President resorts to violence almost immediately after the unrest begins. She attempts to use diplomacy to stop the rioting but puts very little effort into her attempts at diplomacy. An example of the president trying to stop the unrest is when she gives her first actual speech to the public. She says:

In the long term, this will mean a need for greater financial independence, a more responsible government, and a commitment to long-term growth. These are the things we all want. These are things we all need. Unfortunately, the realities of our short-term condition exist in sharp contrast to that. I know you are hurting, so I wish I had better news for you today" (Hickman, "The Street is Burning").

The President tries to quell the unrest using diplomacy at first with that single attempt but the people will not cease their rioting because they have been put down too much for too long. After her failure at quelling the unrest with diplomacy, she resorts to absolute violence under martial law. She begins to exterminate people systematically if they cause trouble for her and the government by rioting, attacking police, or being out after a set curfew. The totalitarian aspect of the government in this case, aside from rationing the

food and energy, is overt violence. The totalitarian aspect of the governments in these works leads to the idea that people living under these governments have become an expendable resource and a commodity in and of themselves.

### **Human Commodification**

The clones in “Nine Lives” are an example of a human becoming a resource. The clones were created for specific purposes, and they are replaced when they die with little effort. When nine of the John Chow clones die, their replacements are found and sent with little time in-between. “It’s a clone [...] The other Exploit Team they’re bringing with them [...] A Twelveclone” (Le Guin 949). The wording here is interesting as well because the term “Exploit Team” has a double meaning. The new clone team is the team that will go out to do the mining. However, they are also expendable enough that their skills will be exploited for the benefit of the humans who live on earth, not necessarily the clones. Even natural born humans are treated as resources shown by Pugh’s statement about the desperation for people to go out into the fringes to mine for fuel. Pugh states “Look at me. My IIQ and GC are half this John Chow’s. Yet they wanted me so badly for the Far Out Service that when I volunteered they took me and fitted me with an artificial lung and corrected my myopia. Now if there were enough good sound lads about would they be taking one-lunged shortsighted Welshmen?” (Le Guin 944). Pugh’s replacement lung and the correction of his myopia shows that no one is really thought of as an independent entity as the planet needs resources and will get them by any means necessary, even taking people who are ill or underqualified and fixing the problem using cloning or other medical methods. This gives some credence to Pugh and Martin’s own

expendability as resources used to find other places that are rich in ore and minerals used to manufacture fuel meaning that they are in similar status as the clones themselves. Each has a purpose and is utilized for that purpose until it cannot be used any more. The same is seen in *The Running Man*.

The world of *The Running Man* is built in such a way that the impoverished are seen as commodities and resources to be exploited by the Games Federation for the entertainment of others. The people who live below a certain income level are used as resources because they are forced to take jobs that could endanger their lives including working for the Games Federation as a contestant for their games. For example, one game called Treadmill to Bucks took contestants with chronic heart or lung problems and made them run on a treadmill while they were asked questions and would receive money for correct answers. The contestant that is highlighted in the novel has a heart attack while running on the treadmill and is wheeled off without winning any money because he could not complete the game (King 2). Ben Richards' wife knows how the society works and how the Games Federation preys on the lower-classes. She states as Ben is leaving to try out for one of the games "Ben, this is just what they want" (King 3). Though Richards' wife is unable to finish her statement because Richards cuts her off, it shows that the Game Federation thrives on the desperation of people like Richards because they receive a near unlimited supply of people to put onto these shows because of their desperation for food, medical care, and other basic amenities. Richards and his wife are desperate because they cannot get access to doctors and medical care for themselves or their eighteen-month-old daughter, who is dying due to severe flu and fever. Also, the government itself has forced the impoverished to have what is called a Free-Vee so that

they can watch the games on it and see the money that can be made by participating in these games (King 1). The people of Richards' income level are made to become desperate enough to participate in the games to entertain people and hope that they will receive enough money to benefit their families and treat whatever disease or other problem they may have at that time. Richards' is similar to the clones of Le Guin's work because he is seen as a resource that is easily replaced and is not seen as a fellow human but is seen as something that can be exploited for the benefit of the wealthy. Richards is seen as a resource to be utilized for the comfort of the upper class and can be replaced by the Games Federation should he die during one of the games. The use of the poor as tools for entertainment is also seen in *Tokyo Ghost*.

In *Tokyo Ghost*, technology has replaced humans in many low-level job spheres, leading to a labor surplus. This resulted in the people becoming desperate for work so they could pay for basic amenities. This desperation led to various instances of game shows like the ones found in *The Running Man*. People were willing to do life-threatening or incredibly disturbing things to entertain others in the hopes of receiving compensation. The earliest and most explicit examples are the Death Races that occur regularly in the city. The drivers are able to kill each other and any bystanders that are unlucky enough to be close to the track. If they survive for another race they are greatly compensated and have absolute control over their rewards for winning the race, including "Body pirating, clone incest, snuff prostitutes, Hong Kong suicide slots, clown torture...Anything for a price to the handful who can afford it" (Remender, "The Atomic Garden").

While the details of these rewards are up for discussion, these rewards cost exorbitant amounts of money, and only the people who are executives or successful Death Racers can afford such services, leaving everyone else out and exploiting the victims of these without consequence because they paid to be able to do it. The replacement of people in the working class led to a massive explosion in the lower-class populations. This led to the working class being seen as the most expendable. For example, a criminal named Davey Trauma goes on a rampage calling himself “the Jesus of murder” and kills a few hundred people in a matter of hours. Sensibly, this would be seen as an atrocity of epic proportions, however, the large lower-class population leads to a different response. The next morning after Davey is caught, the news anchor that is speaking about the murders states, “In other good news, the victims of last night’s murder spree were all low folk, so no big whoop.” (Remender, “The Atomic Garden”). The lower and working classes are the ones with the highest use of the nanotech drugs because they have nothing else to do, and when some of them are killed, it is considered a blessing because it means fewer mouths to feed. The lower classes are unable to work and they crave distractions from the problems that they face because of their lack of income. This issue also arises briefly in Hickman’s *East of West*.

The plot of *East of West* focuses primarily on the world leaders and their stories. However, the regular citizenry comes into focus when the President of the United States implements Martial Law after the citizens begin to protest and riot over shortages of food and water. The masses in The US have begun to run low on vital resources because of the destitute nature of the planet. There was already much unrest over how the president received her position, but the lack of financial viability, overall economic viability, food



and water availability created a more bifurcated class system than what had already existed at the time which, according to the comic, was a single class system that devolved into the people who can eat and those who can't (Hickman, "The World"). The demonstrations and riots weigh on the President until she decides that the regular citizenry are little more than sheep or cattle when the president states, "I was chosen and they have expectations of me. They would call it managing the livestock... Put out the fire by any means necessary" (Hickman, "The Street is Burning"). In order to quell the unrest, she makes a public statement mentioning issues that have already been affecting the people and will affect the people to the point that they will have little to no independence. She further explains her decision and attitude about the common man when she murders three teenagers for rioting. She tells the survivor, "Soon I will have to beg for money so that you... animals can continue your lives—so many content in their squalor... Be grateful for what little you have" (Hickman, "The Street is Burning"). She sees the United States and its people as pigs living in a pen in filth. She holds little regard for them and she treats them like cattle because none of them have been contributing to make the United States better.

The people, who once held the titles of "citizen" or "human," have had those titles stripped from them in favor of the title of "resource." The commodification of the people, often those in the lower classes, demonstrates that in a post-apocalyptic society only some can be considered human. This system bifurcates the people to a greater effect than if the system is left alone. This bifurcation eliminates the middle classes in favor of them moving either up or down in the new two class society that is created. In "Nine Lives" the lower classes are the clones and the people who are sent into deep space to locate ore rich

planets to mine. *The Running Man* uses a more traditional class system using the three tier system but shows that the lower-class makes up a significant portion of the population. *Tokyo Ghost* uses a class system that classifies people as expendable or not expendable where the non-expendable people are the rich. *East of West* demonstrates the creation of the two tier class system with the extermination of the people who rebel. The Post-Apocalyptic genre uses this two class system to demonstrate the Anthropocene fears relating to the end result of resource scarcity. The solution to resource scarcity, in the genre, is the hope that technology advances far enough to mitigate these issues before they can become a major problem.

### **Technology**

The use of technology throughout these works provides the backdrop for the problems that create the environments seen in these works. The problems found in these works are partially produced by the technology that is utilized within the societies portrayed because technology is the backbone of the societies found in many post-apocalyptic novels. The technology portrayed in Post-Apocalyptic literature allows for numerous portrayals of technological advancements and plot directions. However, this technology often produces negative effects which can be unintentional or intentional based on the author's views. "Nine Lives" takes technology and uses it to create human beings from vats for the purpose of mining for ore in life threatening environments and the repopulation of earth after famines destroy the majority of humankind. Technology in *The Running Man* produces pollution that threatens the health of the population at large.

*Tokyo Ghost* portrays technology as the destruction of humanity. The Endless Indian Nation in *East of West* uses technology to quietly subjugate all other nations.

The use of technology allowed for the creation of clones to be used for the genetic restructuring of the human race (Le Guin 944). Technology may have also been a factor in the explosion of the population and the eventual decline of available resources. Technology is also used to provide the salvation of mankind through both the cloning programs and the use of star ships and other vessels that allow intergalactic space travel for the mining of fuel. The world in “Nine Lives” must rely on technology to preserve what is left of the human gene pool and reintroduce lost genes by producing clones. The technology also creates an interesting dynamic in the clones themselves because the clones will suffer through the deaths of other clones that they are a part of. The clones in “Nine Lives” are created in batches of ten to twelve. Should one of them die, the others will suffer that death along with them. However, the other clones will survive the experience as no actual damage is being done to their bodies though the stress on their bodies is tremendous (Le Guin 943). The clones are a form of technology in and of themselves because their creation is not natural birth and they appear to utilize some form of hive mind throughout the story. Taking that into consideration, the technology presented in “Nine Lives” is technology that replicates and replaces humanity to a certain point because natural born humans have become rarer in post famine earth.

Technology in *The Running Man* led to the massive increases in pollution in the air which causes emphysema on a regular basis in the majority of the population. They also use technology to counteract those effects with the nose filters that General Atomics makes for public use (King 170). The overuse of the factories caused severe weather

changes. Though the exact nature of the changes in weather is unspecified, the changes were severe enough that the factories had to be shut down for an indeterminate amount of time (King 169). Interestingly, the technology presented in the novel is not incredibly futuristic outside of the amounts of pollution and radiation that are produced, as King tried to base the novel in what was available in 1982. The people in the novel still use cassette tapes and clipboards (King 23). Interestingly, the most advanced piece of technology appears to be the cars that the people drive. The way that the cars are described is as “air cars” (King 187). These air cars apparently do not put out any form of exhaust other than oxygen or some other harmless gas as noted by the text, “There was no carbon monoxide with the air cars” (King 187). The cars that people drive utilize an engine that does not use gasoline. It is clear that the society in *The Running Man* has made some advances in their technological capability, but this is overshadowed by the air pollution present and the need to use air filters in order to go outside without getting sick. Pollution via technology is one of the most prevalent themes next to the dangers of dependence on such technology in Remender’s *Tokyo Ghost*.

Technology in *Tokyo Ghost* is the source of the problems facing the planet and the society as a whole. Flak’s nano-tech drugs allow for distraction from the problems and a benefit for the people who utilize these for their own entertainment. However, the few and possibly detrimental benefits of this tech also brought about the pitiful state of the planet by allowing factories, robots, and other pollution causing entities to function all year without stopping for anything (Remender, “The Atomic Garden”). Mr. Flak even planned on developing Tokyo into another Los Angeles by taking the farmlands and water and building new factories and cities on the land (Remender, “Come Join Us”). The

technology is used to alter human physical appearance as well through the use of the same nano-tech that is found in the drugs that Flak offers to the masses (Remender, “The Atomic Garden”). The people have become dependent on the tech offered by Flak in many ways, leading them into detrimental dependence that was broken by Debbie releasing a massive EMP blast that covered all of Japan and Los Angeles (Remender, “Come Join Us”). Ironically, the EMP and the Japanese nation were protected by the same tech that ruined Los Angeles and its people. The leader of the Japanese nation used technology to create a nation devoid of technology in order to preserve the people and the resources. Mr. Flak used technology to run industry and exploited the natural world until nothing remained of it. In *Tokyo Ghost*, technology was used in similar but opposite ways by two people who saw the value of technology as the savior of the human race.

Technology in *East of West* proves to be the greatest salvation for the Endless Indian Nation, the primary developer and user of technology. The Endless Nation is the remnants of the Native American tribes that were present during the civil war. The Endless Nation utilized technology and began investing more time and energy into its development. This irony of the Native American turning away from the natural world and their ancestors is striking because they began to see technology as their savior instead of a destroyer. The development of this technology led the Endless Nation to become the most technologically advanced on earth. However, they are also the most secretive.

This secrecy leads to conflicts amongst the Endless Nation and those outside because they will not divulge many of their technological advances to the other nations of the world. However, they do divulge a few of the advances such as transportation technology, leading to a more futuristic world. Their advancements became the backbone

of the world's infrastructure in *East of West* (Hickman, "The World"). They have the beginnings of the society presented in *Tokyo Ghost*. The people of the Endless Nation have begun to integrate technology directly into their bodies. For example, The Shaman of the Endless Nation Premier has a computer that has been graphed to his head that runs prediction algorithms based on some input data. This use of technology allowed for the dwindling numbers of Native Americans to survive for as long as they have, making technology their one and only savior leading them to abandon all notions of spirituality or naturalism (Hickman, "The World"). The innovations of the Endless Indian Nation allow them to begin taking over the other nations on the battlefield because the other nations have not developed their technology enough. The Endless Nation uses their technology to force the other nations to do what they want either through their war machines or the sale of civilian technologies that make life easier for the people of the other nations which leads to strife between the other major nations and a possible guarantee of victory should the Endless Nation take a side.

Technology in these works is treated in various ways, most often being used as the savior of the people or the source of their eventual destruction. "Nine Lives" uses technology to save humanity's dwindling numbers and cure various diseases. Technology is also used to produce the clones that take on the most dangerous of jobs. *The Running Man* uses technology to demonstrate how it would lead to eventual destruction on a large scale through pollution from factories. The most advanced form of technology presented in *The Running Man* is the vehicles. *Tokyo Ghost* uses technology to demonstrate that technology can be used to destroy people and the environment through the unregulated industry presented by Mr. Flak's character and it can be used to protect the natural world

seen with the EMP field surrounding Japan. East of West shows how technology can be the savior of an entire people through the Endless Indian Nation and their advancements. These themes and speculations of Anthropocene fears appear in Luke Shandy's Post-Apocalyptic work *The Maintenance Men*.

### ***The Maintenance Men Manuscript Analysis***

The novel *Maintenance Men* demonstrates similar speculations common in the Post-Apocalyptic genre. This work speculates on Anthropocene fears of industry, toxic environments, tyrannical governments, lack of resources, and the commodification of people. The primary setting for the world in the *Maintenance Men* story does not follow the other works as the apocalyptic event was not manmade. The apocalypse was a natural event, following the type of apocalypse seen in pre-World War II works. Even though the outside world was destroyed via natural processes, the *Maintenance Men* stories still offer some insights into the human driven change inside The Complex's artificial environment due to the apparent overpopulation and rundown nature of The Complex itself, the ruling system's way of governing the people, and the commodification of people within The Complex.

*Maintenance Men* shows issues with overpopulation with how the streets look and the people live. This is displayed in numerous places and chapters. The introduction of the story notes that The Complex houses "almost five million people" but neglects to mention how large The Complex actually is, leaving the specifics of the actual size of The Complex unknown. This is where the chapter about the character Commando becomes useful in tracing the population theme. The people inside The Complex have

grown in number while the amounts of food have become scarcer as their numbers cannot be sustained without rationing. For example, Section Seven of The Complex is a slum where people do what they can to survive the harsh realities of their lives. Section Seven is described in this way, “It was filled with crime and desperate people doing desperate things in order to put food on the table; even if it meant breaking through the checkpoint gates into other sections because there was not enough to go around. The people here were consistently looking for work and needing to be in food lines” (Shandy, “Crew Fifty-Five: Ice Chills the Bones”). The lifestyles that the people in Section Seven live is not ideal in any way. They often need to break into the other sections in order to take food, or they scavenge and steal food from others in the section. The amount of food present is worsened by the landscape in which The Complex resides, the arctic north.

The growth of food must be undertaken inside The Complex itself, meaning that there is limited space for farming resulting in shortages that cannot feed the population because of the inhospitable landscapes outside of the Complex (Shandy, “Introduction”). The size of the population leads to yet another issue with space. The amounts of space present for people inside the Complex are extremely limited. This is shown when Commando notes a large family huddled by a street fire. The story notes, “He noticed a small group of people huddles together in an alley way around a small fire made from paper and pieces of clothing. He stopped for a minute and took in the sight. Four men, three kids, and four women were all huddled together. A family, he assumed, kicked out because a bigger family forced them out” (Shandy, “Crew 0: Commando”). This shows that the space is so limited that people can freely kick each other out of their homes if they need the extra space. The lack of space and food is a direct result of the number of



people and the limited amounts of space available to them leading to rundown streets, houses, and people who are disheveled and unable to care for themselves. This overpopulation and the issues surrounding it leads to issues relating to the environment inside The Complex.

The issues around the natural world in *Maintenance Men* are unique in that what remains of the natural world is all inside The Complex. The world outside The Complex is nothing more than ice and snow, leaving the world without vegetation and animals to sustain the population. However, The Complex would need to be self-sufficient in that regard. Inside the complex, there are factory and labor Sections. Sections One through Forty-Nine contain all of the industry and farming for The Complex. Eagle, the leader of the Maintenance Men as a whole, notes this. He states, “Sections Fifty through One-Hundred, the politicians, the CEOs, the all-around wealthy. Sections One through Forty-Nine, everyone else, the others, the laborers, farmers, the factory workers, and the fix its” (Shandy, “Crew 0: Eagle”). Eagle lists out the types of people who live in each Section. One through Forty-Nine has all of the labor classes who do the manual labor and produce most of the industrial goods and food within The Complex. The factories and the farms produce large amounts of pollution within The Complex as both operate for an indiscriminate amount of time.

If taking the approach of the other works, the factories run twenty-four hours a day or just under that. The amount of pollution this creates leads to the need for air filtration within The Complex at large. The need for such filtration is similar to the toxic environments found in *The Running Man* and the need for the people to use personal nose filters and Tokyo Ghost inside Mr. Flak’s office using filtrated air. The need for the

filtration systems is noted by Commando in an argument with an officer about putting out his cigar. Commando asks, “Why? Air filters ain’t strong enough no more?” (Shandy, “Crew 0: Commando”). The chapter Crew 96: Lurker makes mention of factories within Sections One through Three. Eye, the leader of Crew Ninety-Six says, “My father had to work in a factory in Section One for a measly three bucks a day to put fake chicken on our table” (Shandy, “Crew 96: Lurker”). The factories that are operating reduce the quality of the air inside The Complex and the filtration system must operate the same amount of time as the factories to keep the air clean or mostly clean. The operation of the factories fall to the leaders of the Sections and the leaders of each Section operate independantly of the others, leading to a system of possible abuse and totalitarian tendencies.

The government in *Maintenance Men* functions differently than some of the totalitarian systems found in the other works. The Sections of the complex function as semi-independent states and the Congressmen and Congresswomen who run the Sections all meet once every year to create laws that apply to all Sections (Shandy, “Crew 0: Commando”). The leadership of each Section is semi-independent because they must also abide by any laws that they all create while in a large session. This does not work within the realm of traditional Post-Apocalyptic literature because the leaders of these governments are not duly elected leaders, but are instead, people who seized power through questionable means like the President of the Union in *East of West* where all of her predecessors are murdered allowing her to take the leadership. This does not fit into the traditional Anthropocene speculation of a single government holding unlimited power. However, the leaders of each section do hold large amounts of power and can lead

their section how they see fit with little interference allowing for totalitarian tendencies that are common to the Post-Apocalyptic genre.

For example, in Section Thirty, the electrical grid has shut down due to unknown reasons, and this is where more of the government functions appear. The Chairman of the Council is giving a press conference when a reporter questions him about Section Thirty's congressman and his response to the issue. After the question, the Chairman states, "He acts of his own accord like all other Section Leaders do. What he does is not our business. Now, this conference is over! I will not tolerate the continued questioning of Section Leadership" (Shandy, "Crew 0: Commando"). This shows that the government has some totalitarian methods regarding criticism in that the people can question the leadership, but they cannot question them too much or there could be consequences for it. The government does not see the people as people. Instead, they see the people as creatures who need strong hands to guide them lest they cause trouble. This leads to the reasoning behind the creation of the Maintenance Men and the commodification of the Maintenance Men in particular.

The Maintenance Men, as a group, are taken from the prisons and forced to work in the tunnels, often until their deaths. This is shown when the men of Crew Ninety-Six are asking their leader how he got into the Maintenance Men. The character Guts is upset about being in the Maintenance Men and is counting down the days until he can leave and go back home. Guts states, "Two weeks, four days, and nine hours until I can leave" (Shandy, "Crew 96: Lurker"). This shows two things about the people who end up being a part of the Maintenance Men. The first is that they are unwilling to be there. Guts was forced to join the Maintenance Men for unknown reasons, but the fact that he is counting

down until he can leave shows that he is there against his will. The second is that the men in the tunnels may also be counting down until they can go because they too are there unwillingly. The leader of the team, Eye, is there unwillingly as well. This is shown by his and Gut's conversation about Gut's haste to leave the tunnels. Eye states, "I've been in these tunnels the better part of thirty years. I'm not young anymore like you but I've seen many pass through, both returning to the surface after their time is finished or dying on a repair. If you want to focus on the life that awaits you up there, you will die down here" (Shandy, "Crew 96: Lurker").

Eye has been made to be in the tunnels for thirty years because of something he did on the surface which turned out to be murder because he wanted to take someone's food or to cannibalize him because he was so hungry (Shandy, "Crew 96: Lurker"). The Complex relies on the criminal populations to keep The Complex running, and this method removes them from the public eye and if they die in the tunnels then it is not a big deal because they are literally and figuratively lower than the lowest classes of people. The Maintenance Men and the people who comprise it are seen as expendable resources as the vast majority of them possibly come from criminal backgrounds. This is further demonstrated by Senator Peter Belfor, who oversees where Eagle and Commando work. During an argument about whether or not the Senator owes Eagle for his campaign support the Senator says:

I do not owe you a thing. In fact, no one in this ass of a Dome does! You are invisible. You and your people are dust in the wind that means zilch to any upstanding member of society. Your division is made up of criminals and death row inmates, and you want me to believe that you are important? You are simply

a criminal, at the direction of the Grand Council, leading other criminals to their deaths. So, while you do provide a service to The Complex, do not expect recognition or acknowledgement that it's people fixing the place up but instead drones ("Shandy, Crew 0: Eagle").

The Senator makes it explicit that the people in the tunnels are in fact criminals and death row inmates that are made to fix the tunnels as their punishment. The senator also makes it clear that the men down there are invisible to the public eye as they are not worth seeing or acknowledging for their work of keeping The Complex operational. This shows the division of people into classes as there are three class systems as stated by Eagle. Eagle states, "Sections Fifty through One-Hundred, the politicians, the CEOs, the all-around wealthy. Sections One through Fifty, everyone else, the others, the laborers, the factory workers, and the fix its. And then there is us, without a section living under the feet of the people" (Shandy, "Crew 0: Eagle"). The class division comes from the idea that the people who end up in the Maintenance Men or the factory Sections are expendable in some way. The expendability of those in the factory districts is never explored but the expendability of the Maintenance Men is clear as they can die in the tunnels at any time and be replaced by another person on Death Row or a basic criminal.

This status leads to their being made to use outdated technology to keep The Complex operational. This is shown in the first chapter of the work. The primary character of the first chapter "Crew 75: The Hole," Tack, laments the difficulties of having to use technology that is well behind the times. He states, "Disassembling the crane was always an arduous process [...] This stuff was a far cry and a stumble backwards from what I was used to before I ended up down here. The automatic coffee

makers, cars that had no wheels, my bathroom cleaning bot, those were the days. But now, I'm stuck working like a primitive on this BS Tech" (Shandy, "Crew 75: The Hole"). They do not have the proper equipment to survive. This is similar to Richards' time as a sweeper in *The Running Man*. He had leaky radiation shields and clothing while working which would not protect him from the radiation. The Maintenance Men have a similar problem with the equipment that they use to repair The Complex. This later becomes a problem after the creatures that inhabit the tunnels begin to appear, as the weapons they have to keep themselves safe do not mirror any futuristic technology. Instead, the weapons mirror twenty-first century weaponry that use ballistic projectiles. The Upper Levels of The Complex appear to have weapons and equipment that are not reminiscent of the twenty-first century shown by Commando's weapon in the chapter "Crew 55: Ice Chills the Bones." Commando pulls out a weapon to kill the three men of Crew Fifty-Five after they refuse to join him in his mission. The pistol he uses fires off superheated plasma (Shandy, "Crew 55: Ice Chills the Bones"). The technology that the Maintenance Men must use is less effective and has the chance to kill them if not handled properly. Their status as criminals makes them undesirable for life outside of the tunnels and this undesirability leads to their lackluster tech as a way to increase the likelihood that they would not return to the surface.

Post-Apocalyptic literature focuses on the inherent fears of the Anthropocene era in which humanity is currently residing. It speculates on the populations exceeding available resources, the toxicity of the environment that is created from over industrialization, the rise of a single government entity that is tyrannical, and the commodification of humanity. The use of technology as both savior and the creator of

earth's problems permeate these works making technology the hope of the Anthropocene era. Post-apocalyptic works focus on worst case scenarios and assume the worst of humanity's abilities and culture. It speculates on the rise of a corporate culture where companies and the rich rule society with an iron fist and exploit the people for their own gains. The apocalypse of these works is caused almost exclusively by humanity in some way. These works all speculate on these issues in different ways leading to a vast speculative base that sees similar themes inherent in the Anthropocene. The Post-Apocalyptic Genre takes these themes and applies them to varying degrees, creating a bleak apocalyptic world that humanity must try to avoid at all costs.

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*The Maintenance Men*

**An original Fiction Manuscript**

**By**

**Luke Samuel Shandy**

## Introduction

It is the year 2157. The world has degraded and has become inhospitable.

Another Ice Age swept the planet in an unprecedented natural disaster. People began to fight over the remnants of the world. Abandoned factories, refineries, and cities covered the landscape. Humanity, as severed as it was, separated further into tribal systems.

Those who were able to unite and think of the future gathered to think of a way to save humanity's future while the others froze to death in the wastelands. However, nature took its course and began a major cooling period leading to another Ice Age. As the cooling continued and crops and livestock died, humanity became desperate. They began experiments and technological research. After exhausting nearly all available options ranging from genetic alterations for cold survival in humans and genetically modifying plants to survive in cold climates; all attempts proved useless. In a last ditch and desperate attempt to prepare for the time when the world was no longer viable for humanity, an experimental structure was built in the arctic north, the only segment of the world left where the small wars had never occurred. Under the watchful eye of the newly minted governing body, The Hundred Council, a ruling body grown from the ideals of democracy and the cooperative nature of the United Nations system, The Complex was completed in under twenty years.

The Complex is home to some five million people and possibly the last five million humans left on the planet after its operation of over two hundred years. The Complex was divided into sections, one-hundred in total. Each section is governed by a duly elected congressman or congresswoman and as such each section operates almost

independently from the other but all meet every five years as the Hundred Council to make and enact policy that affects all whom live in The Complex.

This grand experiment took people from all walks of life and put them into an artificial environment engineered to mimic the world prior to the Ice Age. The Complex was the culmination of humanity's achievements meant to test the viability of humanity surviving a seemingly permanent ice age. To keep this massive operation running and keeping The Complex in working order, The Maintenance Men were created. Their creation was not made public, nor is their work public. For those unfortunate enough to end up in The Maintenance Men, their life motto becomes "Work, live, and die in the tunnels; for the sake of those above."

### **Prologue: The Tunnels**

Echoes rang through the icy metal tunnels beneath The Complex. A man hung from the ceiling by a cable attached to his belt. Sparks flew as he welded the outer shell of the massive power line. The heated metal showed red and orange, casting a shadow over the large visor over the man's face. Welder turned the torch off and clasped it back onto his belt. He could feel the heat from the cable through his insulated suit, causing sweat drops to form on his forehead.

"That should do it," he said looking at his handiwork. "Lower me down!" he called down the shaft. He felt a jerk on the cable and felt himself being lowered down the shaft at a steady pace.

The ice inside the shaft covered almost everything on the walls sometimes jutting out at a spear-like point. Welder bounced himself around the jutting pieces being sure to avoid tearing his yellow heat suit. The bulk of the suit compounded with the size and weight of his tools made it rather difficult for him to maneuver but because he had many years of practice found the bulkiness of it to be less than a minor inconvenience. His booted feet finally touched ground and he unhooked himself from the cable.

"The weld should hold this time," he said to the green suited man in front of him.

"Yeah let's hope so," he said. He looked down at his watch and groaned. "We need to get back. We've got ten minutes till the batteries die."

"Yeah let's."

The two men hopped into a large motorized cart and started the engine. The cart lurched forward and continued at a steady pace. The engine kept the vehicle warm enough to resist the formation of ice in the tunnels. The engine rattled and clanked as it

travelled down the complex system of turns, straightaways, and forks. The headlights on the front were the only illumination available to the two men. Welder looked down as at a small square that kept showing tiny yellow dots around them.

“Steps, we have a problem. Look at the motion sensor.”

Steps looked at it and groaned.

“Crap, we were almost to base too.”

“They’re one the way. Want to scout it out?”

“Might as well.”

He stopped the cart and opened a large bag attached to the rear of the cart. He pulled out two large rifles and handed one to Welder. They each attached a magazine to their rifles and fired a couple rounds behind them to warm up the mechanisms. The bullets struck ice and metal making loud impact noise throughout the tunnel.

“Can you shoot that while driving?” Welder asked.

“Yeah. Done it before.”

“Seven minutes left,” Welder said.

“Fine.”

Steps moved the cart forward and held the wheel with one hand while supporting the rifle with the other. Welder leaned back against the seat and held his rifle with both hands.

“My shots will be wild so I don’t know what I’ll hit,” Steps said.

“I’ll make up for it.”

The cart neared the mass of dots on the motion sensor and the two men waited for their moment. The dots moved closer and closer to them. They rounded a corner on the

tracks and the men were in the center of the mass. They looked around but saw nothing around them. Steps kept the cart going as he lowered his rifle and looked around quickly as he drove.

“See anything Welder?”

“Not a thing.”

“Think the sensor grid is on the fritz?”

“Could be. We’ll need to tell Tech to check out the system.”

Welder lowered his rifle and held it in his lap. Steps put his in between them on the floor. The cart neared a large wall with a large painted ‘X’ made out of a screwdriver and wrench. Steps opened up a small panel on the wall and pressed a few buttons. The door opened up and allowed them passage into another room. The room held little light except for a couple large bulbs in the corners of the ceiling. They parked the cart on a rotating panel on the floor and put their rifles on the wall racks and removed their helmets as the door closed behind them. Steps pulled a lever to open the door leading into their Res-Box. Lights flashed on both sides of the door and they heard the loud unlocking of the mechanism. The door slid open with a loud hiss and a rush of warm air hit them.

Steps and Welder looked inside the room. The fire pit was empty. The beds were upturned and broken. The kitchen was destroyed. The two men rushed in forgetting their weapons. The room smelled like a sewer and the stench of it stung.

“What the hell happened in here?” Welder asked, scrunching his nose.

They began to sift through the broken mess when they heard a high pitched groan. They turned and saw nothing. They crept through the Res-Box, stepping over broken

cups, plates, pieces of their bunks, and some discarded supplies. “Something is very wrong,” Welder said.

“Agreed.”

“You think one got in?”

“How? Those things can’t even walk straight,” Steps replied.

Welder heard a loud crack under his boot. He looked down and saw a large piece of transparent blue ice under his foot. He looked down at it and let out a slow deliberate breath. He heard a clang near the kitchen and looked over to where Steps was standing. Steps was not moving and stayed in his spot looking into the kitchen. Welder walked over to where he was standing and placed his hand on Steps’ shoulder.

“Steps you alright?”

He did not answer.

“Steps?”

Welder turned Steps’ face towards himself and fell backwards, shoving Steps away from him. Welder looked at his friend and saw his face shattered on the ground after the body fell. Pieces of skin, nose, ears, eyes, mouth, and teeth were scattered about the floor, frozen solid and purple. Welder stood up quickly and looked around the room quickly. He heard a low humming sound near him and turned. Nothing was there. He looked around. His forehead was covered in sweat and his eyes moved every which way, looking for he didn’t know what.

“God, one did get in here,” he whispered.

He heard scraping near where the bunks used to be. He looked over in the darkness he saw red and gold orbs looking back at him. He froze and didn’t blink. He



began to feel around for something he could use. His hand fell onto a small knife. He grasped it in his hand and held it behind his back. He glanced away for a moment and he looked back to the bunks and the orbs were gone. He bit his lip and clutched the knife tighter in his hand. He felt a rush of cold behind him and he screamed. He whirled his knife hand around and saw it had turned purple and was cracking, threatening to fall off his arm. He clutched his frozen hand in the other. He opened his eyes and saw the orbs looking right into his.

### **Crew 75: The Hole**

The cold air of the tunnel stagnated around us as we worked. This was our third job of the week. Another one of the power cables had come undone. The ice likes to invade places where it does not belong and makes our lives harder by breaking what we fix. Having to fix three cables in as many days is the definition of a painful experience. These aren't the run of the mill power cables either. These are the ones that have potential to dwarf a man in size. Working three of these things to get them hooked back up again is a strenuous process requiring a lot of focus and skill. I was on the platform overlooking the worksite and was controlling our portable crane to line up the cable while Tinder welded the thing back in place. I heard a beep in my ear coming from my wrist timer. We had twenty-five minutes until our suits ran out of power. The timer beeps at five minute intervals so we always know how much time we have until we need to find a charging station. They were placed inside both the vehicle tunnels and the footpath tunnels that branched out from the vehicle tunnels.

“Tack, bring the cable over to the left a couple more inches. The shield is out of line,” he called out to me through my radio.

I worked my set of levers. The crane wires and the power cable groaned loudly under the stress of the ice and its own weight as it moved. Tinder waved at me. I stopped the crane and I saw the telltale sparks of welding. It was amazing that anything could get hot or sizzle at all down here. It was actually so cold down here that little to no sound could be heard. Our suits transferred some noise because they were solid objects but it always came as a muffled ruffling. It was nowhere near absolute zero, thank heavens, but we always needed our radios to communicate or hear anything. I finished moving the

levers to realign the cable for Tinder and I sat down on the platform letting my legs dangle over the edge. My radio crackled.

“Tack, Tinder, you guys copy?”

I put my finger on a button on my wrist.

“Tack here. What’s going on?”

“You boys almost finished? Your suits have about twenty-three minutes of power left and accounting for travel time using the buggy it’s more like fifteen before they run out of power. I’d hate to see you guys end up as icicles.”

“Yeah, we’re almost done here. If we need to charge the suits on the way back there is a recharge station in Foot Tunnel Eight-A we can use.”

“That’ll take you guys off course but it’s doable. Still, though, try not to take too long. The temperature keeps fluctuating and it’s trending towards going deeper to the negatives.”

“Right, I got ya. We’ll try to keep it quick.”

I let my radio turn off and held up two fingers like a ‘peace’ sign. He signaled back to me the same way, letting me know that he heard the same message and set to finish his work. I watched the sparks fall and fizzle out before they hit the ground. It was odd; I always got a strange sense of happiness watching the sparks fly or fall from a weld. I guess it’s just an odd fascination with the way they fall or the lights.

“Tack, let the hooks go. I’m all done,” Tinder told me through the radio.

I stood back up and gave him a thumb up. Tinder lowered himself down on his winch and ran off to the side. When he was at a safe distance I pressed a small button on my console releasing the hooks on the cable. The hooks snapped and fell away from the

cable. They clanged on the floor and our suits muffled the loud scraping and banging sounds to almost non-existence. The cable itself didn't move, so we did not need to restart the process. If it had detached it could have been disastrous, aside from it killing one of us if we didn't get out of the way in time.

“Alright. We're done here,” Tinder said through the radio relieved.

I picked up my console and unplugged it from the stand that we brought with us.

I lowered the stand and the console down from the platform using a small pulley.

Tinder grabbed them and walked out of the generator room to our buggy in the tunnel. I climbed down the ladder and jumped off when I was closer to the ground.

“Let's load up the crane and get out of here,” I said.

“Agreed.”

I grabbed by drill and set about opposite of Tinder to get the arm of the crane unhooked so we could disassemble the base and load it all up. Disassembling the crane was always an arduous process. Dumb twenty-first century tech. This stuff was a far cry and a stumble backwards from what I was used to before I ended up down here. The automatic coffee, cars that had no wheels, my bathroom cleaning bot, those were the days. But now, I'm stuck working like a primitive on this BS Tech. As I removed the screws I placed them in the pouch on my waist. We weren't allowed to lose these things because they weren't made anymore. It was ridiculous. I would have thought that the machinists would've kept making this stuff since we use them almost every day or two. My drill was warm but the bits on these things were susceptible to breaking because of pressure or cold; both were bad options. Again, twenty-first century technology; got to love it. I removed the final screw and dropped it in my pouch and strapped the drill to my

belt. Tinder and I lifted up the arm of the crane and balanced it on our shoulders and walked over to the trailer on the buggy. We set it down in the trailer and stretched our backs and rubbed our shoulders. The thing was heavy. Steel alloys; why? I don't understand and I probably never will understand why they are so heavy.

We went back to get the base apart. I thought the arm of the crane was bad; the base was always worse. It was all lug nuts, bolts, and sharp edges. Tinder and I set to work on the lug nuts first. We pulled out the wrenches and knuckled down. These wrenches are at least four foot long; enough to have use a weapon if we got bored. Luckily we haven't had a chance to be bored. I leaned against the wrench to unscrew the nut but it wouldn't budge. I looked at it as closely as I could with my suit visor in the way. A small layer of ice had grown on it. I gently tapped at the ice using the wrench. If I really let loose and hit the nut as hard as I could, I could break the nut and replacing these things requires paperwork and requisitions, I doubt the Brass would allow us. I chipped away at the ice layer little by little until the nut was completely freed. I pushed the wrench again and the nut turned. I unscrewed it and placed in my pouch. I did this for all thirty lug nuts on my side. My watch beeped again. I looked at the timer. It said fifteen minutes. Did I miss a beep? Disassembling the equipment is an intensive process but it couldn't have taken ten minutes. I looked over to Tinder. He scratched the side of his helmet. Apparently he didn't know either. Our equipment better not be breaking down. The last thing we need is a critical equipment failure. Or, we both need to be more observant. In the words of Commando, "Miss a beep, you're a dead heap." Neither of us wanted to be a dead heap. With our timers ticking down we really had to get in gear. We removed the stakes out of the base and put those into a hard case. The stakes were sharp

enough to pierce the suits and any other case that we could use for them if it was not made of metal. Since they could pierce our suits if dropped or mishandled Tinder and I had to keep the point away from ourselves. We managed to load up the nuts, bolts, and stakes on the crane so he hoisted the base on our shoulders like we did the other piece and loaded it into the trailer.

I went up to the driver seat of the buggy and started the engine. It squealed and grinded as it started up. Smoke billowed from the exhaust tube underneath blinding us for a couple seconds because of the small area. The vehicular tunnels were large but not large enough to vent the exhaust from the buggies. I sat there waiting for the needle on the engine heat to move up so we could go. The tunnels would freeze just about everything too fast for it to heat up. Thank goodness we had a ration of Anti-freeze left for this job. Tinder sat down next to me in the passenger side of the trolley and groaned loudly. He opened the glove box on the buggy and pulled a couple recharge cords out of it. Buggies could give us about five extra minutes of power while driving. It was sometimes enough to get to an actual Recharge Zone but that depended on how fast you drove and how far away the Recharge Zone was. I took the cord he offered and plugged into the pack on my suit. With the two of us draining power from the buggy it would take a bit longer for the buggy to be drivable. I activated my radio.

“I’m going to take a nice hot shower when we get back,” I told Tinder.

“Don’t hog it like you always do. A ten minute shower is long enough.”

“I only take five minutes!”

“Bull! You take an hour; a whole hour! There’s never hot water left after you get done! We should have called you ‘Water Hog’. But you had to step on that tack first

didn't ya?" He was waving his arms around and pointing at me. He did like to talk with his hands.

"Why didn't you?" I asked.

"We had no idea you just sit there and let the water run."

He was angry but I did not care. A shower was a shower and a hot one is what I needed.

"I never take an hour." I waved him off and looked at the temperature gauge on the buggy's dash. "We are almost ready to go."

"Fine, ignore me, but I get to shower first. I have seniority over you."

"Maybe we just need more than one shower."

Our radios squealed and buzzed in our ears. I groaned at the ungodly sound gritted my teeth.

"Would you guys get a move on!" Comms yelled at us. "I can hear every word you're saying. I should also mention; you have ten minutes left. You missed another warning!"

"Why didn't you say anything Comms? That's your job. To communicate," I said.

"Calm down Comms, you're not helping," Tinder said. "We'll just go to the charge station in 'FT' Eight-A. We got time to make it there.

I looked at the heat reading, "yeah we're good to go. We'll head over there first then come back."

There was silence on the radio. Comms was most likely doing his deep breathing exercises. He always did that when he got mad. It must be something that those psychedelics do or something.

“Fine. Be careful though. The temperature’s dropping and it doesn’t look like it is going to stop soon.”

Our radios cut off and Tinder and I were ready to be on our way. I pressed the pedal on the buggy lightly. Ice and tires often times don’t mix. Even though we have antifreeze coating on the tires it was still a possibility they could freeze over. It was a risk that we had to take but we did not like to take it.

I drove down the tunnels. Ice, concrete, some kind of cold resistant metal was on the walls and large power cables lined them as well in the Vehicle Tunnel. The people who built this place didn’t feel that it was relevant to tell us everything about the structure of The Complex or The Dome. They just told us enough to keep it running. The power coming from our temporary recharger in the buggy was about drained so we were back to about fifteen minutes to get back to the Res-Box.

I kept driving. Tinder and I stayed silent. I guess we both just wanted to get back. The buggy was getting a bit jumpy as I drove. It felt like it was trying to skip. I would have traction then I would have none. It wasn’t a risk yet but I didn’t like it. I pushed the pedal slightly harder when I had traction to get some speed so we could get back. I glanced over at Tinder and he was relaxing in his seat. I pressed the accelerator. Our tires screeched and we started skidding off to the side of the tunnel. I stopped accelerating. The buggy slid along the ice until it actually hit the wall itself. Tinder hit the wall with his shoulder and I hit my head on the back rest on Tinder’s side of the buggy. I checked my helmet for any damage and luckily there wasn’t any. Tinder was rubbing his shoulder and eventually gave me a thumb up. I looked over my side of the trolley down at the wheels. They were covered in a small layer of frost. I activated my radio again.



“Crap. Tires are frosted over.”

Tinder looked at me. “What? I thought you put the anti-freezing agent on them.”

“I did.”

Tinder looked down at his waist belt and pulled a thermometer off of it. He brushed the screen with his glove removing some of the built up frost. He looked down at it for a little bit and sighed heavily.

“It got colder,” he said.

“By how much?”

“Thirty Degrees.”

“It was negative twenty when we left the Res-Box.”

“Now its negative fifty down here. That agent is only good to negative thirty.”

“We’re going to have to walk back aren’t we?”

“Yeah,” Tinder pressed his call button on his radio and he and I waited for Comms to respond.

“How the hell does the temperature drop like that?” Tinder asked me.

“Honestly, I have no idea. Maybe the Sci-Crew in Tunnel Forty-Six might know. We’ll send a message when we get back.”

The cold was beginning to make my suit heavy. Despite our personal heaters the suits were still susceptible to cold on the outside depending on how long we are out. My radio warbled and gave off some static before I could hear the voice on the other end.

“Comms here. Where are you guys?”

“The temperature dropped again. We’re going to have to walk back. Our tires have frozen over.” Tinder said.

“Alright, leave the gear where it’s at you can go back to get it later, frozen or not, it’s all we got so we’ll need to retrieve it later. You guys are going to need to hoof it back here pretty quick. I’m seeing another potential temp drop and your suits won’t be able to handle this one even with the heat generators. That recharge station may be out of the question at this point. Your suits are almost out of power. The buggy charger added about five minutes but you drained that power pretty fast. You’re down to ten minutes again.”

“Roger that. We’re on our way now.”

Our radios shut off again and we began our trek back to the Res-Box. We needed to take ‘FT Eight-A’ so we could recharge on the way. I looked over at the tunnel label on the wall. It said ‘VT Four-B.’

“This could be a problem,” I told Tinder. “We’re in VT Four B. Is there another charge station closer to us?”

“Yeah, I think so. There should be one in Foot Tunnel Four C.”

“How long will it take to get there?”

“Six minutes tops if we walk fast.”

“This is why I hate night operations.”

We started walking. We needed to go back the way we came to get to the access point for the Foot Tunnels. We managed to get to the access point fairly quickly. We ran most of the way. Tinder and I almost fell a couple times but we made it. I grabbed the bar on the door and pushed it in and turned it. The door opened and we had to get single file to fit through the door. Tinder went first and I closed the door behind us.

The tunnels were always quiet. The only sound that would be heard down here is the occasional icicle breaking off and hitting the ground or the small vehicles we use to

transport ourselves. The materials in our suit were built to resist cold but they still need a powered heater to give us absolute protection for little while; thirty minutes at most, if we're lucky, and God is with us.

Tinder and I were practically shoulder to shoulder in the Foot Tunnel. Our suits kept bumping into each other and we couldn't separate too far either. The tunnel walls were a danger all their own. Touch one for too long and you get stuck on it or one of the jagged outcroppings could tear the suit. Tinder had moved several paces ahead of me so we could walk single file and avoid both the wall and our suits. The walk was silent for the most part but our silence added to the silence of the tunnel. It was a little unnerving. We turned a corner leading back to our Res-Box and stopped at a wall in the middle of the path.

"When did this happen?" Tinder said. "You've got to be kidding me!"

"Ah hell," I said looking at the wall in front of us. "Think we can pick our way through?"

"No, it's too thick."

I tapped the wall with my knuckle and listened. The dull thuds sounded back at me.

"Yup, it's at least fourteen inches thick."

"It would take too long to break through. We'll have to double back a little ways and take an adjacent tunnel that would reconnect with this one."

"Let's hurry. We've got five minutes left according to my timer."

We turned away from the wall and went back the way we came. This was not a situation we liked to be in. I'm sure the other crews would say the same. Walls of ice

grow quickly here. Any moisture at all is frozen in less than a second. I've always wondered about this place. These tunnels. Most of them are naturally occurring tunnels in the glaciers while man built some and reinforced the natural tunnels to keep them from breaking apart. Even so, the structures, natural or no, were old, very old. Doubling back was a risky proposition even for us who were becoming desperate to find a recharge station and with a temp drop being a possibility in anyway was a bad sign. We had to file into a single line as we hit a narrow passage leading to the next tunnel. Hopefully this one could get us back on track. The ice in this tunnel was not as smooth as some of the others I've worked in. These walls were jagged and filled with ice spikes. The stories I've heard about people ripping their suits on these spikes made me extremely wary. I didn't like this one bit. I'm sure Tinder didn't either. We went through the concrete arch way and shuffled down the tunnel slowly to avoid the walls. My vision filled with haze from our suits expelling our breath out into the cold air. The hose from the portable heater on my back waded and wriggled with each step I took. The weight of my personal tool belt felt like four stacked cinder blocks on my waist. My boots threatened to slip with every step. I took a step and heard something that no Maintenance Man ever wants to hear while on the job. Tinder looked back at me and down to my foot.

“Don't move, Tack. Not a single muscle.”

I looked down slowly. There was a crack in the ice. It was known to all of us that the natural tunnels tended to be hollow underneath. Several crews have fallen into whatever is below. I did not want to be one of those guys. Tinder moved slowly and reached for my waist. He grabbed the buckle of my tool belt and slowly unhitched it decreasing some of the weight on my person. The belt swung from my waist and part of

the buckle slapped the ice below me. Another crack formed where it had hit. Tinder moved the belt away from me and set it on the ground behind him. He put his hand out to me.

“Slowly, grab my hand and I’ll pull you to me.”

I moved slowly but with every move I could see the cracks in the ice getting bigger. I placed my hand in his and we clasped them together. Tinder took a couple small steps back leaving his arm outstretched to me. He held up his other hand with three fingers extended. He put one finger down, then another, and on the final one he pulled as hard as he could. I slid over the crack and rammed into Tinder. We slid backwards on the ice but my belt was in our way. Tinder’s feet got tangled in it and we fell over in a heap. We collided with the floor, hard. I looked over Tinder’s shoulder and saw a massive string of jagged lines breaking in the ice. If we moved we would fall through, that was certain. Tinder, however, tried to push us up.

“Tinder! Don’t move!”

The floor below us shattered. It felt like the world slowed down as we fell through. Tinder’s visor looked away from me as we flipped over each other. We reached out for anything that we could grab. I flipped over in a summersault and my head hit Tinder’s and we got tangled on each other before hitting something. I slid down further in the darkness. I didn’t know where Tinder had gone and I reached around myself trying to slow myself on this slide. I could hear my heart in my ears and my lungs burned with my rapid intake of breath. I kicked my legs out hoping for my boots to start hitting something to stop me. I kicked out one more time when I felt my leg hit and I flipped over again. I landed on my back and my leg burned with pain and refused to move. I moved my hand

up to my helmet and turned on the attached flashlight. The light moved up and illuminated a white ceiling. I was in an ice cave. I moved my head slowly and looked to the sides. Nothing. Just ice.

I pushed myself up into a sitting position. My back seared and I groaned with each move of my head and neck. I turned myself over and tried to stand on my one good leg. I propped myself up but my foot slipped and I fell onto my stomach. I clenched my fists as I felt both my leg and back ache. My wrist beeped at me as a yellow light blinked alongside the sound. I pulled my arm in and brushed off the residual frost just enough for me to see a countdown on the screen.

“One minute and thirty seconds till my battery dies,” I whispered.

I looked up from my prone position and began to crawl deeper into the cave. It was slow going and my muscles weren't having any of it. I stopped and laid my head on the ground. The cold air was already seeping through my suit. It was a miracle that my suit hadn't been punctured by something on the way down. The cold almost felt refreshing in a way. I stared at the black ceiling wondering if Tinder was alright. I believed that he was. I survived so he must have as well. He was probably sitting by a little fire he made using that Tinder Box he always carried in his belt. I reached out and activated my radio.

“Comms, Tinder? You guys out there?” I heard only static. “You guys out there?” I heard only static again. I looked at my watch. Thirty seconds. “I have only a few seconds left before my suit dies. I don't know if you guys will receive this but I...”

My radio died suddenly and I looked at my watch to see a double zero blinking on it before it too went black. The flashlight on my helmet kept working because it had its own battery pack.

I felt the suit's heat begin to give way to the cold in the cave. I reached for the power pack on my back but I couldn't reach it. The bulk of the suit kept me from doing so. I tried to move to keep myself somewhat warm before the heat in my suit dissipated altogether but my muscles had locked because of the temperatures. I looked up and to my right a little ways I saw something up against the wall. It wasn't Tinder though. It was far too skinny and the color of the suit was wrong. Our suits were blue and red. This one looked closer to puke green. I looked up at his chest and saw a large "83" printed on it. That means he was part of crew eighty-three. We knew one of their guys vanished a couple years ago. Guess I found him. I tried to move forward to get a closer look but my muscles still would not budge. I felt a wave of cold hit me again. I felt my skin start to burn and I yelled. I began to shiver and my teeth clacked against each other. I tried to breathe but all I could breathe was ice. I looked over at the guy on the wall and I tried to force my arm to reach out. I made it move less than an inch before I felt my skin crack and shatter inside the suit. I screamed again. My body had frozen in place.

I saw a light moving across the walls as I lay there. I couldn't look over my shoulder but I knew that it was Tinder, it had to be. I heard him talking into his radio. It was him. I had hoped he would be alright. I wanted to call out to him but my mouth wouldn't move. I tried to make a sound but my whines could not be heard through the thick visor over my face. The light crept upwards and disappeared from my frail sight. I screeched, my lips moved ever so slightly and they too, cracked away from my face. I

didn't feel it this time. He had to make it out of the tunnels. Go drink a beer back at the Res-Box, take nap in the bunks, and eat a hot meal.

I looked over to the frozen remains in front of me. It was looking back at me. If I could have smiled I would have. It looked as though it was saying, "I'm here." I groaned and felt a rush of prickling heat. It felt so good. I could feel my body warming. I forced my mouth to move just a little more, if only to hear my voice one last time. I spoke the best I could but I sounded wrong. I couldn't recognize my voice. I remained silent until I felt the burning increase even more so and it felt so good. I wanted more. I looked into the eyes of my companion and I swear I saw a smile. My breath was filled with ice and I all I could feel was fire on my skin. I matched my companion's smile with a silent one of my own. I felt so warm, so very warm.



**Crew 96: Lurker**

The Res-Box was quiet. The lights were on and brightened the grey concrete box. A small fire crackled in the center of the room providing little heat and light. The shadows from the flames flicked along the walls of the Res-Box. A round table was by the bunks, with four chairs, four plates, cups, and napkins. By the fire sat four men, each with two cards in hand and a pile of chips in the middle. Sweat ran down their faces and each looked from one to the other with squinted eyes.

“Pair of sixes,” one said laying his cards on the floor.

“Damn, I fold.”

“Pair of tens,” the third said, laying his card down, smiling.

“Ha! I think I have you beat.” The fourth revealed his cards. “Pair of Aces.”

“AH!” the other three screamed.

“That’s the fourth time today!”

“Old age and treachery beats youth and inexperience any day,” the fourth said laughing. “You guys owe me your beers.”

“Screw you Eye.”

“A bet’s a bet Guts.”

Eye stood up slowly letting his knees and other joints pop and crack back into their normal position. He walked slowly over to the bed and laid down. His snores filled the air while the others cleaned up. The only feature out from under his blanket was his white and grey hair.

“I don’t believe this,” Guts said.

“What?”

“Eye won four times at cards today with the same hand! Then he just goes off and falls asleep as if nothing happened! Damn that old man!”

“He didn’t break any rules.”

Guts looked over his shoulder, “Figured you would say that Rule.” He turned back to the man sitting at a chair by a supply locker. “Now I have to go without my Lager for another week.”

“Shut it, I know you keep a stash somewhere in here Guts. It’s only a matter of time till I find it.”

“Why do you care if I do or don’t?”

“I need to have a complete stock list of everything we have. I’d rather know that we have everything we need and not need it rather need something and not have it.”

“You worry too much.”

“My name isn’t Stock for nothing,” he laughed.

Guts walked over to the bunks and placed a hand on Eye’s shoulder.

He shook his shoulder hard. “Old man wake up!”

Eye jolted awake and glared at Guts.

“What, dear God, could be so important you woke me like that?”

“I got a bulletin from a buddy of mine in Crew 106, He said a couple guys from 75 fell a few days ago. That true?”

“How should I know?” Eye rolled to his side and pulled the blanket to his chin.

“Just wondering.”

“If they did they’re as good as dead. No one survives a fall down here.”

Guts walked back over to the fire pit and sat down contemplating. He stretched out his hands and warmed them. He sat motionless listening to the cracks of the sticks and watching the ashes rise and fall. The Res-Box was quiet overall. The only sounds were Stock moving things to and fro, Eye's snores from the bunks, and Rule reciting his rule book again. Guts sighed and leaned closer to the fire.

"Two weeks, four days, and nine hours until I can leave," Guts murmured.

"Are you so eager to leave Guts?" Eye asked from his bunk.

"I thought you were sleeping."

"I was, but now I'm not. You're eager to leave these tunnels that much is quite clear."

Guts looked around and noticed the others in his crew had stopped doing their individual tasks and were listening closely. Eye sat up and looked out to the others in the crew that he was responsible for.

"Listen close," Eye said. "I've been in these tunnels the better part of thirty years. I'm not young anymore like you but I've seen many pass through, both returning to the surface after their time is finished or dying on a repair. If you want to focus on the life that awaits you up there," he said pointing to the ceiling. He then pointed down to the floor, "you will die down here."

"What?" Guts asked.

"Focus on what's in front of you Guts. Only then will you be able to live long enough to return to the surface."

"Why have you been down here so long?" Stock asked from near the back of the room.

“I ain’t sayin.”

“Come on old man. Thirty years isn’t anything to scoff at. What did you do?”

Eye glared at Guts, “You want to know so bad? Fine.” Eye put his index finger on Gut’s heart. “I cut a man open so I could have a decent meal for once in my life.” Guts remained in a shocked silence. “Hunger’ll do terrible things to a man. My father had to work in some rundown factory sweatshop in Section One for a measly three bucks a day to put fake chicken on our table. My sentence was eighty years with possibility of parole. My parole being denied, I’m down here till the day I finally keel over. It isn’t all bad though. Look here,” he pointed to their fridge box, “three squares a day in rations, beer,” he pointed to their bunks, “and a place to sleep. It’s pretty comfortable here ain’t it? The only thing it’ll cost you is your life.”

As Eagle was lecturing Guts and the others listening, a siren blared inside the Res-Box and the alarm lights flashed by the pneumatic tube on the wall by the airlock door. Eye moved away from Guts and went over to the tube. He pulled out a long canister and opened the latch. Eye read over the paper, crumpled it, and threw it on the ground. He looked over to his crew and grimaced.

“We’ve been assigned to go out into Section Eight.”

“Eight?” Stock asked.

“Why?” Rule asked.

“There’s nothing there.” Guts said.

“Apparently Eagle and Commando need us for a rescue.”

The generators on the suits buzzed as the four men walked single file through the walkway tunnels webbing off of the reinforced drive tunnels. Eye looked at his wrist timer and looked ahead. The equipment slung on the waist belts of the heat suits and occasionally scraped the ice covered walls breaking small chunks of the ice from them. Their suits squeaked and rubbed as they walked. Guts groaned behind Eye as his flashlight illuminated little to the front of them.

“How do you see down here Eye? Even with our flashlights it’s almost pitch black.”

“I’ve always had good eyes, simple as that.”

“What do you think about his assignment?” Rule asked. “Seems out of place for Maintenance Men.”

“Yeah, we’re repairmen not a rescue crew,” Stock said.

“Agreed,” said Guts.

“It’s not for us to decide our assignments boys.” Eye hesitated. “Although, I’m wondering as well.”

Eye stopped in front of a latched door with a giant red ‘X’ painted over it and a number ‘8’ underneath the paint. Eye grabbed the bar on the door pulled it out, rotated clockwise ninety degrees and pushed it back in. Loud resonating knocks and metal scratching metal could be heard and the door cracked open. The men stepped through.

“Welcome to Section Eight, ‘The Abandoned,’” Eye said.

“My god,” Guts said.

Ruins of the above complex lied in front of them. Buildings, parks, homes, nearly everything from above had been integrated into the ice. Some of the structures had been

encased by ice completely frozen within a picture frame. Others had become a part of the overall structure of the tunnels fusing with the curves, turns, and walls. The ruins stretched on for what seemed like miles.

“What happened here?” Stock asked.

“No one knows,” Eye replied. He looked at his wrist timer. “Come on. We’ll be out of power in ten minutes and the nearest recharge station is six minutes away on foot.”

The men hustled through the ruins of Section Eight. Their boots crunched over frozen glass, frozen sand from the artificial beaches, and other things from the old city. In the ice were the bodies of the people. All clothed, all preserved, all purple skin and bones, and only to be seen by the little amount of light from their headlamps. They reached the recharge station after six minutes of jogging in full gear. Eye kicked the debris out of their way and they all entered the airtight room. Rule closed the door behind them and released the latches on his helmet.

“The hell are you doing?” Eye yelled, rushing over to Rule. He shoved Rule’s arms out of the way and redid the latches to his helmet. “Are you crazy?”

“What? There’s an airlock.”

“The airlock at this station doesn’t work. Or, if you hadn’t noticed it’s still cold in here.”

Rule looked down at his thermometer. He swallowed.

“It’s negative twenty in here.”

“Exactly. This section is different. It’s not like the others. In this section, the city is the tunnel and it’s the people’s tomb. And it would have yours if I hadn’t latched your suit again.” Eye groaned and walked over to the recharge station. He pulled out a small

power cord and reached to his back and plugged the cord into his generator. “Well come on. We have to recharge while the generators are running. It’ll take longer but that’s what we need to do.”

The others all found cables and plugged them into their generators as well. They stood in complete silence. The suits’ generators hummed and the readouts on the charger slowly crept upwards. Guts looked around the small room. It was like so many of the recharge stations that he had been in before but this one felt different. The cold was still present, their faces were still encased in the helmets, and the lights were not functioning, neither was the airlock. Four dings sounded and the recharge cables disconnected themselves and retreated back into the wall.

“Guts you’re with me. Stock, Rule, go explore the area nearest this station, do not go further than two hundred meters out,” Eye said. “This rescue needs to be done fast. If someone managed to survive in here we need to get them quickly.

“That’s a pretty big ‘if’ Eye.” Guts said.

“I know.”

“Keep radio contact in five minute intervals. We have thirty minutes.”

### 3

The area was littered with artifacts from times past. The ice crept its way along the ground absorbing the remains of people and buildings. The darkness extended over the wasted tunnelscape. Lamp posts were tilted or collapsed things hung from the windows frozen in place. Guts stepped on something and heard a crunch. He looked down. His foot was on a head. Its hair was long and wild, its form withered and bony but mostly intact. The ice ran through the pocks and creases of the skin looking like silver veins. Guts

stepped off the head and looked at its face. Its eyes were empty black pockets surrounded by purple cracked skin. Its teeth were on full display with the mouth wide open. Guts felt a hand on his shoulder.

“We need to keep moving. The one we’re looking for might be in this general area.”

“Right,” Guts said, breathing heavily.

Eye pressed a button on his wrist. He heard the static of the radio in his ear.

“Stock, Rule, how’s it going?”

“Not good. We’re having trouble navigating this place Eye. It’s really slow going,” Rule said. “I have procedures for things like this but none of them are working right now.”

“Rule, procedures and manuals only get you so far. Rely on yourself some.”

“The last time I did that I wound up in the Maintenance Men.”

“I know. I’m telling you again. Procedures only go so far.” Eye cut off the radio and sighed. He waved to Guts to follow and they continued walking.

They climbed up and over the edge of a small building and looked around them. The area was completely flat. The only thing that stuck out was a large pole and fixed on top was rectangle board. Around them were the remains of what looked like chairs of some kind. Eye pulled out a small box with a little square screen. They wandered around the flat space. There was a red colored road surrounding the entire area, though it had gone pale during its time in the ice. A small broken bar was attached to small pillar of ice followed immediately by a small pit. Gut walked over to it and ran his gloved hand along



it. His hand slid right across it. He heard a small alarm go off in his helmet. He pulled out his thermometer and looked at it.

“Eye! Temperature dropped!” he said into his radio.

“I know. My alarm went off too. We may have to call this off altogether.”

The radio crackled to life and Guts pressed the button on his wrist.

“This is Guts. Go ahead.”

“Stock here. You’re not going to believe this. We found a grave yard.”

“This whole place is a grave yard. Why’s yours important?”

“Ours is organized.”

Eye and Guts looked at other.

“What do you mean?”

“The place was cleared of debris and everything. There are people lined up in a mass grave. All of their arms are crossed over their chests and everything.”

“What about the job?”

“Nothing yet, we... never mind I think we got something. There is a heat signature on our infrared.”

“We’re on our way.”

Eye looked at his timer.

“Twenty minutes.”

4

Stock and Rule looked around the mass grave. There had to be hundreds of bodies there. All lined up and looking uniform. They were all facing the same direction and lined up in perfect rows of thirty by ten. They stood by one corps in particular.

“This is too weird,” Rule said.

“Yeah.”

“How do you think this happened Stock?”

“The bodies or the city falling into the tunnels?”

“Any of it.”

“For the bodies, someone had to be moving them. For the city, I have no freaking idea.”

Rule pulled out his procedures manual and flipped it open.

“Won’t that thing freeze?” Stock asked.

“I have another in my belt and one back at the Res-Box.” He stopped flipping through the book and put it back in the tool belt. “I’ll need to write a new section for this.”

Rule had his infrared scanner out and scanning each corpse. Stock heard the scanner beep rapidly. He looked over at Rule who was slapping the scanner on the side.

“Stop hitting it or you’ll break it again,” Stock said.

“It has to be broken already. Giving me a heat signature on a frozen body? Come on.”

“Yeah,” Stock mumbled. “Here comes Guts and Eye.”

“What have you got?” Eye asked.

“This corpse is apparently giving off a heat signature,” Stock said.

“Impossible,” Guts said.

“Neither one of you are akin to lie,” Eye replied. “Let me have a look.”

Eye knelt down and placed his hand on the corpse’s face. He tapped it with a finger and continued down the body. Nothing. The only response was the sound of finger hitting frozen corpse. He grabbed the shoulder and rolled it partially on its side.

“Strange. This one’s not frozen to the ground,” he said. “This one is recent.”

Eye took out his infrared camera and pointed it to the corpse in question. The scanner picked up the same heat signature that Rule’s did. Eye scanned it again. The same result. Eye’s timer beeped, as did the others’.

“Ten minutes,” Stock said.

“Right. We should go back to the recharge station and figure this out,” Eye responded.

They began to walk away from the corpse. Guts stopped and looked at it quickly before kicking it with his boot.

“Dumb body,” he mumbled.

He ran to catch up with the rest to the group. Guts fell, slamming his visor on the ground. He felt a throbbing in his head. He looked down to his foot to see what he tripped on. Purple and blue fingers were wrapped around his ankle. He could feel the pressure on his skin through the suit and he could feel cold seeping into his foot. He looked down and saw that his foot had somehow gotten tangled in the limbs of the body and its face was staring right at him. He kicked with his other foot and broke the fingers off the hand. The corpse slid on the ground and stopped after tapping another body; this one frozen into the

ground. Guts ran as fast as he could. He caught up with them and they went back to the recharge station.

The charging station hummed as it gave the men its last reserve of power. They stood in silence. Guts had told them what happened to him. Though, the others had brushed it off. The power cords disconnected themselves and the men were able to leave. They opened the airlock and stood still. They stared at what was before them.

It was wearing a full body suit: orange in color, black visor over the face, and black gloves and boots. It had a heater hose running from a power pack to the back of the head, just like theirs.

“My god,” Eye said. “Hey!” he called. “Are you called Lurker from Crew One Zero Eight?”

It nodded.

“We were sent to get you out of here!”

The one in the orange, now known as Lurker, ran up to Eye and tried to hug him around the suit.

“Thank you,” he said. “I’ve been down here for months!”

“Is there anyone else?”

“No.”

“We need to know your story but we need to get you back to the Res-Box.”

## 5

The five of them travelled through the honeycomb tunnels and made it back to the Res-Box. Guts pulled the lever and the outer door opened into the airlock. Eye took off

his gear and put it in his locker. Guts, Rule, and Stock did the same. Lurker remained still.

“Take off your suit Lurker. You won’t need it in here.” Stock said.

Lurker turned around and hesitated for a while before he started to take off his suit. He undid the clasps on his helmet and removed it. His white hair fell to his shoulders. His left cheek was blue and cracked leaving a sizeable hole in his face. He removed his bodysuit and laid it on the ground. He turned around and saw the others staring at him. His body was covered in scars and cracks. He had patches of purple on his skin and other patches of crimson red on his skin. Eye came over and lightly placed his hand on Lurker’s shoulder after studying Lurker’s features for a time.

“Come on. We get you a blanket and have you sit by the fire.”

Eye pulled the final lever and opened the Res-Box proper allowing all of the men entrance. Eye sat Lurker down by the fire and went to the bunks to get him a blanket. Lurker stared into the fire. He could feel its warmth but he did not relax in it. He watched the tips of the flame bounce, flick, and extinguish. He scooted back.

“It’s been a long time since I’ve felt a fire,” Lurker said.

“It feels nice every now and again,” Guts replied. “What happened to you and your crew?”

“I... uh,” Lurker thought for a while. “I don’t remember.”

“What do you mean?” Eye asked indignantly.

“I don’t remember. I recall going out on a scavenging mission looking for evidence about how that section of The Complex fell into the tunnels. I remember my generator losing power and then nothing.”

The others were silent.

“I woke up inside the recharge station. My suit was plugged in but I had already gotten frostbite.”

“Anything else?” Eye asked.

“When I woke up I remember hearing a sound. It reminded me of someone speaking a foreign language and that’s all I remember.”

“Right,” Eye said under his breath. “We all need some sleep, especially me. I’m no spring chicken.”

Eye helped Lurker up and brought him over to the bunks. Eye lent Lurker his bunk for the night and took the floor. Guts, Stock, and Rule took their own bunks and pulled the blankets over their bodies. The lights turned off and things were quiet. Lurker remained awake. He was covered in sweat and felt like he was lying in lava. He threw the blanket off of him and felt the air rush over him. It felt cold. He fell asleep.

## 6

Alarms blared, waking up the men of crew ninety-six. They each jumped out of their bunks and Eye got up off the floor. They looked over to the first airlock door. It was open. Rule looked around.

“Where’s Lurker?”

They ran to the door. Inside was Lurker, holding onto the release lever for the Res-Box outer airlock. His hand was shaking and he was staring out of the small view port. He was mumbling to himself and stuttering. Lurker felt himself get pulled back and thrown on the ground. Guts stood over him.

“What the hell are you doing?” he yelled. “Do you have any idea what you were about to do?” Lurker remained on the ground mumbling nothings to himself.

Eye walked over to the small viewport and looked outside. He backed away from the view port.

“Everyone back inside now!”

“What’s the problem?” Rule asked.

“There is a pile of corpses outside. Just like in that graveyard. They’re all lined up in rows with their arms crossed over their chests.”

Guts walked up to the viewport. He too looked outside. Guts remained silent and grabbed Lurker by the arm and dragged him into the Res-Box. The others followed quickly and closed the door behind them. Guts threw Lurker to the ground.

“What’s going on? You know more than you’re letting on.”

“I never should have come back with you.”

“I thought you were glad to come along,” Eye said.

“I let myself believe I could be free of the bodies. I was wrong.”

“What are you talking about,” Guts asked. “You know more than you’re telling us.”

“The bodies they’re...”

A loud bang could be heard outside the Res-Box. It sounded like a hundred hands hitting the metal doors. Alarms blared inside the Res-Box. Rule ran over to a small control console.

“Breach detected at the outer airlock!”

“What are they?” Stock asked loudly.

The bangs resonated around them intermingling with the blares of the alarms. The lights spun and flashed red and yellow. Lurker quivered on the floor by the fire pit.

All noises outside stopped. The alarms stopped and the lights went out. The men sat in silence. They looked at each other, having only the fire pit for light.

“We’ve lost power,” Rule said, looking at the console.

“You can’t run from them. No one can,” Lurker whined. “They will chase you, they will find you, they will take you.”

The lights by the door lit up and they heard the hissing of the airlock. The door opened.

The cold crawled inside wailing, screaming, speaking.



## Unmarked Crewman: 60 Years in the Past

1

Uh, Um, come on! Work Dammit! This...This is uh, screw it! My name is not important, but what I have to say is. I am recording this using the standard Maintenance Man Suit Recorder. I have been trapped down in this blasted tunnel for nearly a month after the collapse of the Section Eight Research District. My rations are almost out. I have kept myself alive through the recharge stations in the tunnels and by moving constantly. I have to avoid those freaking monsters. I am safe for now. I found a small spot where I have set up an improvised base with all of the necessities, minus a fire pit and a way to make a fire. I don't know how long I have until I need to move again so I'll take this opportunity to record what has happened on this recorder inside the suit I found.

I was young man living in the dome with what is left of humanity after the planet's orbit went bunk. I wanted to help try and fix the planet to give humanity a place to live, not survive. I was naive and foolish. I had the youthful optimism that was beaten out of me over the years I worked to become a preeminent climatologist. This Dome is where humanity must survive. We can no longer live outside of the dome. The whole planet is covered in ice and snow. The sun has practically vanished behind the clouds. When I had finished my schooling, I had lost hope in a future for mankind which leads me into how I ended up in my current situation.

After I finished my PHD, I was asked to work on a new project that was in development. Me, a climatologist asked to join some over-my-head science project. I had no idea what was going on or why they needed me. All I knew was that the head scientist was fiercely intelligent and unimaginably driven. His name was Derek Axton. Strange

name, I know. I thought so too when I heard it the first time. But he quickly established himself as the absolute ruler of his little kingdom. I was led to his lab and we ended up going through a wrecked portion of the dome and one of its residential sections. He told me it was section eight. I didn't believe him at first. But it became clear to me that his lab was indeed inside section eight. This aroused my suspicions greatly and left me with many, many questions. However, I would need to keep them to myself for the time being. Section Eight used to be a research and development center right in the thick of the misery and misfortune of the lower level residents. They had a steady supply of test subjects I suppose. The place was clean, really clean; a stark contrast to the environments of the other sections nearby. They even put me up in one of the nice rooms where the other scientists lived. I reported to Derek shortly after I had gotten myself set up in the room I was staying in.

The lab was enormous for being placed inside of a residential zone. The center of the lab held a massive tank in the center filled with blue liquid. The doctor pulled me over to it and told me that the liquid inside the container was the future of the dome and that it would enable us to survive even longer as the human race. I was intrigued but he quickly diverted my attention to my work station. He sat me down and told me to get to work. Get to work? He never told me what the hell I was even doing there or why he even needed me. In any case, I knew that whatever existed inside that tank was important. I was given a small sample and a microscope and was told to look. All I saw was small bacteria and that was all. I didn't understand what I was looking at. \*Thud\* Shit!

\*Clank\* \*Shuffle\* \*Smack\* \*Grrr\* \*Clack\* \*Clack\* \*Clack\* \*Clack\*

Okay, okay, I'm fine, I'm alright. This is maddening; these damn things have been tracking me nearly the entire time I have been down here. Okay, I may not have as much time as I thought anymore. Uhh, okay, okay, skipping to the important bit. That bacterium was a virus that was thought to be a hoax. It started out that way nearly, uh, seven hundred years ago with some prank virus called LQP dash seventy-nine. Over time the prank died out and so did the hysteria. Okay, skip to now twenty-seven-thirty-six. The Complex has been established and the world has become an ice planet. The builders of the Complex neglected to input a maintenance system to keep The Complex running. The Complex wasn't made to last more than ten years and it was built thirty years ago. People would be sent down to do maintenance every couple years after The Complex became a necessity. It wasn't until two months ago I figured out why this Derek needed a climatologist. Turns out, the bacteria in that tank had evolved to exist in cold climates and would allow a human to exist in the cold weather without protection. They needed me to track the changes of climate as far back as I could and give them regular reports on my research. I figured out that the bacteria got stronger the colder the planet became. The causes of the intense freezing are mystery now and were all that time ago during the Cenozoic period when the last major Ice age occurred. All that I could recover was in the early 2000's factories ran all hours of the day and night, vehicles ran on fuel made from fossilized rock, and oil was needed for nearly every aspect. Dead to rights, that should have made the planet a tropical zone and it seemed to do that at first by trapping large amounts of Carbon Dioxide in the atmosphere. But, something happened, a tectonic shift, or a change in ocean current, no one knows, and the levels of Carbon Dioxide plummeted rapidly, letting all of the trapped heat disperse. This started a chain reaction that cooled

the planet so rapidly that half the planet froze in almost five-hundred years. An act of God perhaps or a human project gone wrong. In any case the rapid climate shifts were anomalies in their own right, though the heating trends often pointed to human activity, but much was lost to the new Ice Age, and can no longer be confirmed. Apologies I got off track, I still get excited.

By the time I was born and into the future when I finished my degree, The Complex was in great disrepair; at least under the surface. The volunteers slowly dried up and they needed something to keep things running but they had to be able to survive the conditions. Heh, this is like something from an old crappy horror movie. It's still hard for me to believe and I survived it. Them. So far.

The eggheads received some volunteers from the local prison. Three boys, they looked to be in their early twenties, all three on death row. The government had already erased their identities and labelled them as deceased. Convenient. The three boys were strapped into large chairs and they were covered in needles. The three of them looked somewhat scrawny and malnourished. I heard that prison in the complex was bad but seeing them I don't know what kept them going. Anyway, each needle had a tube that ran to the tank in the center of the room. I was allowed to watch this in the observation deck above the experiment site. Lucky me.

Derek oversaw the whole experiment. He personally turned on the machine that injected these kids with the bacteria. They squirmed and screamed in their restraints. I don't blame them. One of the other men sitting next to me told me that the bacteria can cause side excruciating pain if it enters the body. After the experiment had ended I tried to keep quiet and just continue my research and reports. I couldn't though because all I

could hear for the next several months was these three kids screaming, groaning, and yelling. They became aggressive, violent, and craved cold. Craved it. The colder the better. Eventually they lived in cold environments that no other human could have survived without protection. Now, remember that LQP dash seventy-nine prank virus I talked about. As it turns out, they gave this bacterium the same name. I don't if it was to honor the prank virus or what but over time these kids became something else. Their bodies were not human any more. Everything about them had changed. They could not live in heated environments, their bodies morphed, and they looked like living ice. My god, what monsters did this bacteria create? Worse yet they could speak on occasion. Their voices sounded like they were talking through a mechanical cheese grater. Then they got loose and ran into the tunnels. That's when everything went to shit.

\*Grrr\* \*Crash\*

Dammit, their back. I need to move.

\*Huff\* \*Huff\* \*Huff\* \*Screech\* \*Thud\* \*Huff\* \*Huff\*

No stay back!

\*Roar\* \*Screech\* \*Clack\* \*Clack\* \*Huff\* \*Squeak\* \*Boom\*

Okay, Okay, I made it to another charging station. Luckily the doors to these things are thick. The only charging stations down here right now are the ones left over from the days of the volunteer maintenance workers. Now where was I?

Right, the boys escaped into the tunnels. Um, things went bad after that. Mechanical failures, power fluctuations, scientists dying on the job. It was clear to us who was responsible for everything but we did not expect the level of intelligence that they had, especially after their transformations. They seemed to act more as brutes than

humans with reasoning. But they were not done with us yet. Far from it. One day the gauges went crazy and the tank in the room began to bubble. The ground started shaking, things fell from the ceiling and shelves. And then, that sound. That one loud bang. As soon as I heard it felt like I had been slammed n the guts. I couldn't breathe, I couldn't see straight either. The only thing I could make out were three large light blue bodies and yellow orbs at the head. I lost everything in the aftermath. The explosion destroyed the very foundations of the lab and Section Eight. It was only by a miracle that I survived the collapse of Section Eight. I lost consciousness after the blast. When I woke up I was still in the lab and I was pretty banged up. In any case I survived, and I have survived since. I'm hoping that this recording at least survives and my story is heard.

\*Creak\*

What?

\*Growl\*

They opened the door?

Found you.

You stay away from me! No! God help me! Ah!

\*Click\*

## 2

### The Present

“Still listening to that tape?”

“It brings me back to my younger days.”

“Can you believe that it took us so long to get him?”

“We were new at hunting. Though looking back it is pretty pathetic how long we took to get that guy.”

“Who was he anyway?”

“It doesn’t matter now. He’s one of us.”

“True.”

A scrawny built old man stood up from his chair and pressed a button on his audio player and took out the small chip containing the recording and put into his green jacket. He grabbed his cane and put his hat on. The other older man with a more muscular build for his age stood up and lit a cigar. He took a few puffs and walked next to the other.

“Well my old friend, shall we begin another day of work?”

“Yeah.”

They began to walk to the front door through the small house. The house had dingy wallpaper that was peeling in places, bottles littered the floor, and a wall decorated with an assortment of guns decorated the living room where the two men stood.

“What crew should we send in today my friend?” the scrawny man asked the other.

“How about Crew One-Twenty-Nine? They haven’t been given a job in quite some time and the congressman of Section Forty is beating down my door to get a crew in there to fix the heat regulators.”

“Very well then. Off we go.”

**Crew 0: Commando**

An ornate desk rested in front of a window on a crimson colored carpet. Behind it sat Eagle, an old man in a military uniform scribbling on some papers. He set down his pen, reached up and took off his cover and set it onto the desk before sighing and rubbing his eyes. He looked over to Commando who was standing with his back toward Eagle holding a phone receiver to his ear. Eagle could not hear the other end of the line but he could assume things were going as he had expected the conversation to go.

“Yes...Yes...You can't...Now you listen here you...Excuse you...You jackass...You wouldn't dare...Say that to my face...Grr, fine. I'll get it done.”

Commando slammed the receiver back into the holder and swept the phone to the off the small desk and onto the floor. He clenched his fists and clenched his teeth. Eagle grabbed his revolver out of the left-hand drawer in his desk. He walked over to Commando's desk and placed the revolver next to Commando's hand. Commando pushed it back to Eagle.

“Ha! That ass wishes. I'd sooner punch him in his rich face and make it as painful as possible. Make him get bloody for once.”

“It's a wonder that you two haven't already come to blows.”

“As if. You know people like us aren't allowed in Section One Hundred and besides, I can't punch him through the phone.”

“True enough.”

Commando sat down and pulled two small glasses and a bottle of whiskey. He placed the glasses on his desk and poured some of the liquid into each glass. He grabbed them and handed one to Eagle. They each took a small sip and looked at each other.



“So, Eagle, what kind of paper work do we need to fill out now?”

“It’s more condolence letters. I have signed more of these than I’d like in recent years.”

“More? How many does that make?” He set down his glass.

“So far I have signed letters for six crews. Some of them were completely wiped out.”

“I see...” Eagle thought for a minute rubbing his chin. “We’ve lost more crews in this year than ever before. Sounds like Brass has his hands full down there.”

“Well, we didn’t exactly give Brass the easy job did we.”

“No, we certainly did not but keeping these corporate politicians off our asses is no cake walk either.”

“Can’t argue with you there, Senator Ninety-Eight is our biggest problem. He’s constantly trying to get us oversight from one of their committees.”

“I don’t like that anymore than you do but we need to keep this going. We’ve been the gutter snipes for too long. It’s time our guys take center stage.”

“Easy Eagle, remember we need to take this slow and steady. We don’t have enough yet.”

“I am well aware of that Commando. Just looking to the future with bated breath.”

Commando nodded slowly and stood back up. He put his cup back onto his desk, grabbed his cover, and left the room. He walked down the hall and left the building through its massive carved wooden doors.

The dome ceiling of The Complex was in the mode of sunset and early evening. The artificial sky of the dome glowed in orange and red hues with some purple mixed in.

The street lamps were lit and their soft glowing discs illuminated the streets further casting soft light onto the many flower beds, decorative shrubs, and the small trees that lined the street making it look like a park in the evening. Small hovering Atomocars sped by with little noise and the occasional Atomocycle drove by on the sidewalk revving its little nuclear engine. Women and Men lined the streets going one way or another some arm in arm. Some of the women had children gripped to their hands, others purses, or dog leashes attached to those tiny ankle biters that always yip, or riding inside their oversized purses. The men had briefcases in one hand and a newspaper in the other or under their arm while they adjusted their bowler hats or ties. The men all wore black suits while the women wore elegant and pretty dresses with heels. The street was pristine silver chromasteel pavement with the occasional cleaner bot sweeping up forms of debris from the Atomocars. Commando, being dressed in his own fatigues, stood out from the prim and proper people of D Columbia Street. His fatigues were dirty and well-worn from years of use and service. His boots looked as good they could with their faded brown color and scuffed toes. He pulled out a large cigar and put it in his mouth. Lighting it, he watched as two men walked by staring at him with contempt and disgust. He glanced at them giving them an angry look making them walk faster down the street.

“Pansies,” he blew out some smoke.

He looked around the street and grimaced further. Some of the people looked his way and quickly turned away when they saw his face. He wore a severe frown and furrowed eyebrows as he smoked his cigar. He worked on D Columbia Street. His home was on Ganggren Road, a couple Sections over. Commando turned left and walked down D Columbia. Everywhere he looked he saw pristine roads, designer clothes, jewelry,

trees, and flowers, colors, and children that mirrored the adults in everything; facial expressions; upturned noses, powdered cheeks, pale skin, and flawless complexions. He trudged slowly through the crowd blowing his cigar smoke into people's faces. He looked at one man who was complaining to a passing officer. He chuckled inwardly assuming it was about him. The officer walked up to him and pressed his hand to Commando's chest.

“Sir I'm going to need to ask you to put that out.”

Commando studied the officer. He was young with the beginnings of a beard. Had blue eyes and pink lips. A decently well-built physique with a boxy chest.

“Why? Air filters ain't strong enough no more?”

“It's against the law in this Section.”

“Again, why?”

“Your smoke could lead to people getting sick and that could cause an epidemic. As such we arrest all who smoke or who are committing crimes related to the possible contamination leading to illness or death of others.”

“And what would those entail?”

“Lighting a fire fueled by wood or clothing, coughing without covering one's mouth, sneezing without covering, and of course smoking, to name a few.”

“Sounds exhausting.”

“I.D. please. Now.”

“Here,” Commando said, seething, under his calm exterior, handing over his ID card, “call in this number.”

The officer tilted his head to his radio.

“I have a mister Gerald Howler with ID Number one-one-six-eight-forty. Smoking in public, possible spreading of diseased substances, and disturbing the decent folks of D Columbia street.”

The radio crackled, “Number came back. Let this one be. Don’t cross him.”

“Why not?”

“Just don’t,” the radio said.

Commando grabbed the officer by the front of his collar and pulled him up close. Took a drag of the cigar and blew the smoke into the officer’s face making him cough.

“Listen to your radio friend. Don’t cross me kid.” He took his ID from the officer’s hand, clenching his hand on the fabric of the officer’s shirt, Commando threw the officer away. “Now, fuck off! All of you!” The crowds quickly dispersed and he continued his walk home down the newly opened middle of the sidewalk, blowing smoke all the way down.

He walked to the Mag-Train station. People from various Sections cluttered the station. The majority of the people appeared to be from the Corporate Districts based on their suits, ties, briefcases, and holo-tablets. Commando dropped his cigar at the entrance, stepped on it, and went further into the station. He came up to a small kiosk and put in his I.D. card. The screen glowed green and a ticket slowly printed out of the slot. He took the ticket and his card. Every step he took he bumped into someone’s shoulder. They were swarms of sardines with their eyes down in their business or talking into an earpiece not caring about anything but their next line. He took his ticket and walked to the turnstiles and inserted his ticket into another small kiosk. The turnstile unlocked and he walked through. The Mag-Train came to the station shortly after Commando arrived. The Mag-

trains were quite streamlined and were a gunmetal grey color with black tinted windows. The doors slid open and Commando stepped onboard hoping for an easy ride. When the train came into Section Forty-Nine's station the doors opened again and he stepped off with a sigh leaving a slumped body behind him.

"Punk kid. Call me old," he said to himself. He turned back to look at the group the boy was with, "Relax, he'll live...barely," he chuckled. Commando left the station after passing through lines of people trying to pawn off various goods from clothing to jacked tech. He walked out onto the streets he knew well. There was no Chromasteel here. The roads were black pavement with potholes and the sidewalks were brown and covered in garbage. Trees were bare and diseased as were the few weeds that sprouted from various places in the dirt and sidewalk. He walked past people with fires in barrels and rags. He rounded a corner and came to a security checkpoint for Gangren Road. He approached and the guards both saluted. Commando gave a half-hearted salute back.

"Evening. At Ease."

"Evening, sir. How are you?"

Commando stared at the man and handed his ID badge to the guard standing behind the gate's control panel.

"More talkative tonight aren't you Anderson?"

"Yes, sir. He got news that he's going to have a son," the guard behind the console said.

"That right?" Commando pulled a cigar from his jacket pocket and handed it to the guard. "Have one on me tonight."

"Thank you sir."

“My pleasure. What are you going to name him?”

“We haven’t decided yet. He’s not due for another four months, so we have some time.”

“Well congratulations. I’ll see you tomorrow night same place same time.

“Yes sir. Danggren Gate at seven PM sharp.

“Good lad.”

The gate opened and Commando clipped his ID back onto his jacket. He stepped through and continued down the road. This road was not like the other. This one was dirty and poorly lit. Cigarettes, beer bottles, cans, paper, and other litter was everywhere. Almost no one was outside save for some people rummaging through some trash and a guy holding a bottle of booze in one hand and itching his balls with the other while leaning up against a brick wall in an ally. It was seven fifteen pm. Usually there were people out at this time trying to kill each other for a can of beans or for what drops of water they could get. This was the time the timid and conventional people went and stayed inside with their five or six kids. Commando was one of the few who could navigate the streets without being terrorized by the local punk teens that walked around thinking that they were cool. Commando noticed some of the small shrubs had been torn apart and some ripped from the ground entirely. A stark contrast to the Section he just left. He noticed a small group of people huddles together in an ally way around a small fire made from paper and pieces of clothing. He stopped for a minute and took in the sight. Four men, three kids, and four women were all huddled together. A family, he assumed, kicked out because a bigger family forced them out.

“That’s a shame. The ‘family’ that kicked them out probably wasn’t even related,” he mumbled to himself.

He quickened his pace out of disgust. People lived in squalor and their own filth; took dumps in the street because their toilets were busted or dug through the garbage for their next scrap meal. A piece of paper slammed into Commando’s face. He took it off and read it. It was flyer.

“Come to Halanium Square! A Gated Community for the hardworking and decent family located in Section Seventy-Five” the flier said.

“Gated huh? So are we,” Commando mumbled, crumpling the paper.

He came to a door of what would admittedly be one of the nicer homes on this street, but not by much. The house had faded blue paint that was chipped almost completely on one wall. Three cracked windows with steel bars in the front and one window behind bars that had no glass in it. He walked up to the scratched wooden door and put in the key. The lock clicked upon turning and the door begrudgingly opened after Commando had to push and kick it into submission.

Inside was not much more than a sparse arrangement of furniture and dirty dishes and expired or used ration packs. A recliner with a hole in the back stuck in the center of the kitchen area in front of a TV with a barely working cracked screen and TV Tray. Dishes were stacked in the sink and covered in yellow growth. There was torn wallpaper and faded paint on the walls. Water stains on the ceiling and whining pipes in the walls. He took off his jacket and hung it on peg and went and sat in the chair that was in the center of the kitchen. He pulled out his humidor and opened it up. He looked inside to see box empty.

“I gave Anderson my last one? How did I not notice? I suppose he deserved one.”

He shrugged and put the box back by the chair. He sat there staring at the TV’s crackling screen in front of him. There was a press conference going on. The man speaking looked calm and collected but his finger kept twitching and sweat was on his forehead. Commando turned up the volume. The static sound increased but he could barely make out the words.

“Please calm down. The power loss in Section Sixty is only temporary. The problem will be fixed in the coming days.” He pointed to someone off screen, “yes?”

“There are rumors of people who work inside the tunnels to fix these problems. If these rumors are true could it be that they caused this somehow?”

Commando leaned closer to the TV and stared at the fuzzy picture.

“The rumors of people down there are completely unfounded. These issues are fixed via robots controlled by the Robocomms Tower. There are not people down there so this issue stems from something else. As I said, this issue will be fixed in the coming days.” He pointed to someone else.

“Is this outage reminiscent of the collapse of Section Eight?”

The room went silent and the man on screen stared blankly at the reporter off screen. He pulled at his collar and patted his brow with a handkerchief.

“Absolutely not! Section Eight’s Collapse was sudden and highly, highly irregular! Not to mention that was sixty years ago. Any issues surrounding its collapse have been addressed. This outage has nothing to do with what happened sixty years ago.” He straightened his jacket, “Now, if you would please bring your questions to the matter



at hand we may continue or I will end this press conference should there be another question about such an irrelevant issue.” He pointed to another reporter.

“Will the Hundred Council convene before their scheduled return in light of this?”

“It’s possible. However, Congressman Nodex has the situation under control for the time being. He has taken all necessary precautions as the leader of Section Thirty and by government charter neither I nor any other Section Leader may act in his Section without his express permission.”

“But Chairman, the people there are in a panic and the increased police and military presence is stirring the anxiety of the people there.”

“That’s not my concern.”

“What about the protestors that have been killed after the outage?” A reporter in the back of the crowd yelled.

“Congressman Nodex issued the Martial Law order right after the outage so that this very scenario could be avoided. However, the people decided to disobey and cause mischief instead. If nothing else, this will clear out the rabble-rousers and give Section Thirty much needed space. Now Congressman Nodex acts on his own accord like all other Section Leaders do. If the Council sees fault in this we will discuss appropriate measures but so far he has been acting within the law.” The Chairman took in a large breath, “Now this conference is over! I will not tolerate the continued questioning of Section Leadership. If you want to complain I suggest you bring it up with Congressman Nodex.” The Chairman stepped off of the stage and left through a door on his left.

Commando leaned back and chuckled, “You lost your cool there Mister Chairman. It’s good to see you squirm.” He turned off the TV.

Commando stood back up and walked into his living room. He leaned up against the water stained puke green walls and knocked on it with the knuckle of his index finger. The wall gave solid knocks until he heard a smaller dull knock. He felt around and found a hidden flap and lifted it. The edges of the wall opened and a large wall panel came loose. Commando grabbed it and lifted away from the wall setting it down nearby.

“Thank God for the black market and smugglers.”

The inside panel was filled with racks of weapons; shotguns, pistols, semi-automatics, and a full auto SAW. Weapons which he was not supposed to have let alone on full display. Yet, he did not care. These were his weapons and he was going to keep them like he wanted them. He stood back up and went to where the SAW rested. He placed his hands under the weapon and lifted. He groaned. It was heavier than he remembered. He put it back onto the rack and panted. He looked at his hand and it was shaking and he could feel some pain in his joints. He sighed again and sat back in his chair. He reached down and found his own bottle of whiskey, popped the top, and drank back a long swig. He threw the bottle away from himself and let it chatter against the wall. He watched the brown liquid run down the wall. He straightened and glared at the wall. He stood up again and went back into the living room and lay on the couch. It was dark outside and the ceiling screen in the dome had a moon plastered to the top giving off false moonlight.

“Damn them all to hell. They’ll get theirs. I swear it.”

**Crew 0: Eagle**

Eagle stood by the large window in his office and watched Commando walk down the sidewalk puffing a cigar. Eagle reached up and pressed a button on the side of the window making the glass go dark. The room still had light from the ceiling light but the room was now a sickly yellow. He sat down and pulled open a drawer in the desk. He took a pen and slid it underneath and found a small hole and pushed the pen inside. The bottom of the drawer gave way and opened. Eagle grabbed the panel and pulled out a small notebook. He closed the drawer and placed the notebook on his desk. Opening it he found a page with old handwriting and a list of names and numbers. He dialed the number written by the name “Supplier.”

“Hello? Supplier? ... This is Customer nine-nine-four-two. I need those burn bags<sup>1</sup>, the forty-mike-mike<sup>2</sup>, and two fart bags<sup>3</sup> delivered to the Gang Green Chip Blue House... Yes, thank you.”

Eagle put the phone down and leaned back in his chair. He placed the phone back onto the stand and stared at his notebook. It was black, faded, and had scratches and tears on the cover. That book was almost as old as he was minus twenty years. Eagle left the notebook out and stood up. He straightened his jacket, grabbed his cane, and left his office, locking the door behind him.

Eagle hobbled down the hallway on his cane stopped at a large brown door with intricate wood work and a fancy plaque in the center that read “Office of the Senator Belfor.” He lifted his cane and knocked on the door. The door unlocked and opened slightly. Eagle pushed the door open and hobbled inside slowly. The office had white

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<sup>1</sup> Army slang for a bag containing shredded documents to be burned.

<sup>2</sup> An M203 grenade launcher, usually mounted under an M-16

<sup>3</sup> Army slang for Sleeping Bags

walls, an ornate chandelier on the ceiling made of what looked like gold inlaid with some precious gems which cast colorful reflections around the room with the remnants of the sunlight coming through a large glass window. There were taxidermized animals lining one wall with creature ranging from large to small; some of which Eagle had not seen before. He looked over to where the Senator sat. The senator was talking on a small phone and sitting in a large brown leather chair. The Senator looked up and cringed. It was just barely visible but Eagle could see it. The Senator was a large man. He had a beer gut and his hair was peppered white and grey.

“Yeah. Yes dear. I’ll be home for dinner tonight. I’ll see you when I get home.”

The Senator tapped something on his small phone. Eagle could not see it. The Senator put his phone into his suit jacket pocket. He looked up at the elderly Eagle and smiled.

“James.”

“Eagle please. I have not used the name James in many years.”

“Hm, yes you and your nicknames,” the Senator said somewhat pleasantly. “What can I do for you, Eagle?”

“I need to discuss the situation in the tunnels with you.”

“I see. Out with it then.”

“Several crews have been wiped out in recent weeks and there is a danger of more sections deteriorating because of it.”

“Which dome sections are in trouble?”

Eagle pulled a small piece of paper from his jacket pocket and unfolded it.

“Sections Twenty-Eight, Twenty-Nine, and Thirty.”

The Senator looked opened a drawer and pulled out a large binder. He flipped through a few pages and looked back up at Eagle.

“Prioritize Section Thirty. They’ve already lost power and who knows what’s next. Get that one fixed up and stabilized before any more damage is done. The other sections can wait. I assume that is all?”

“For the most part sir. I would like to speak with you about your policy proposal regarding the “Maintenance Droids.”

The Senator sat more upright and fixated his gaze onto Eagle, “What about it?”

“It seems that you are trying to have my division removed from use.”

“I am.”

“What for? My division has had great success with the program and our prisons are practically empty because of that.”

“You are outdated...it’s that simple. You and your entire “division” are relics of a bygone age. Honestly, I can’t believe you and your second haven’t keeled over yet. My grandfather knew you when you were twenty-three for gods sake.”

“I may be old senator but I do have my dignity and my humanity left.”

“No, you don’t Eagle. You’re an old man that won’t get out of the way.”

“You’re no spring chicken either senator.”

“That may be so but you have scuttled many attempts at refining the process for your program and any attempt to place it under an oversight committee. You are a loose cannon in a world that cannot afford someone to be a loose cannon. And don’t get me started on Commando!”

“If you remember Pete, I gave you the recommendation letter that allowed you to run for this office.”

“And what? I owe you know?”

“As a matter of fact, you do. I’m calling in that payment.”

“Fine, what do you want?”

“Your resignation.”

“You’re joking.”

Eagle sat down in the chair in front of the Senator’s desk and leaned the cane against the wood making sure it left a scratch.

“No, I’m not.”

“That is not going to happen Eagle. That is my final answer on that front. I do not owe you a thing. In fact, no one in this ass of a Dome does! You are invisible. You and your people are dust in the wind that mean zilch to any upstanding member of society. Your division is made up of criminals and death row inmates and you want me to believe that you are important. You are simply a criminal, at the direction of the Grand Council, leading other criminals to their deaths. So, while you do provide a service to The Complex, do not expect recognition or acknowledgement that it’s people fixing the place up but instead drones. Now, I need to go home Mr. Eagle. Excuse me.”

The senator stood up grabbed his coat from the back of his chair and slipped over his shoulders. He shoved his way past Eagle and took his hat from the peg on the wall by the door and placed it on his head.

“Good day to you,” he said picking up his briefcase.

Eagle watched the Senator go with tired eyes, “Yes, sir.”

Eagle left the room and walked back to his own office. He sat back in his chair and pulled out a piece of paper and grabbed his pen. He scribbled on the sheet for some time, rolled it up, and sealed it with a piece of tape. He walked over to a wall with a pneumatic tube and placed the sheet into a plastic cylinder and pressed a button on the wall. He placed the cylinder into the tube and closed the small latch door. The cylinder was sucked down into the tube and Eagle went back to his chair and looked out of his small office window. He could see the shining lights, clean streets, and well-to-do people of Section Ninety-Eight in their elaborate clothing and expensive jewelry.

“Sections Fifty through One-Hundred, the politicians, the CEOs, the all-around wealthy. Sections One through Fifty, everyone else, the others, the laborers, the factory workers, and the fix its. And then there is us, without a section living under the feet of the people.”

Eagle grasped his cane firmly and began tapping on it with one finger. He pressed the button by the window and the blackened glass became fully transparent again. Now he could see the people outside without the filter. Their smiles and finery bragging about their soon to begin nightlife. His aged eyes were still as sharp as they used to be but he could see something that the people could not.

“That light there has two volts less than the others on either side, the hover panel on the left side of that car is not receiving enough power making it drive lopsided they may need a new converter, the solar panel on the apartment complex next door is faulty because of the off color of the panel, they need to fire that contractor.” He sighed, “you people have no idea how much effort it is to keep this place running without or with very little flaw.”

He sat down again. He rubbed his chin and white Santa Clause beard. He turned around, leaned down and took the whiskey and glass from his desk and poured himself a little. He drank it down in one swig and turned back around to the window. Eagle held his cane tight twisting it in his left hand still looking at the people. He began to whistle a tune to himself and looked up at the false moon on the ceiling of The Dome waiting for morning.

## 2

Once Morning had arrived Eagle lifted his face from his desk. He wiped his mouth and rubbed his eyes. He hadn't realized that he had slept in his office. He grabbed his cane once more and stood up. He walked over to the mirror and straightened his jacket, put on his cover<sup>4</sup>, and smelled his arm pit. Satisfied, he went back to his desk and took out his revolver from one of the drawers. He opened the cylinder and saw that it was fully loaded.

"No, this won't do." He ejected all six rounds into his hand and reloaded one of the bullets into the cylinder and closed it. "Better."

Eagle tucked the revolver into his jacket and left the room locking his door behind him.

He made his way down the hall to the Senator's office and knocked on the door. Once again, the door clicked and cracked open slightly. He walked in carefully and shut the door behind him; locking it quickly before turning around. He sat in a smaller brown chair in front of the Senator's desk. The Senator stared at Eagle without saying a word. The Senator leaned back into his chair and folded his hand on his desk.

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<sup>4</sup> Military term for a hat that matches their uniform. The hat is worn outside but never indoors.



“Eagle. To what do I owe this unexpected visit?”

“Senator, this is about your decision to prioritize the preservation of Section Thirty over the others.”

The Senator huffed, “What about it? My decision is final.”

“The other sections are in worse condition as it is. Thirty can last longer at the moment than Twenty-Nine or Twenty-Eight. Let me send crews their way first. Thirty still has enough supplies to last for another week, there are already several projects underway and the restoration of Thirty’s electrical grid is still ongoing.”

“This conversation is over Eagle.” The Senator stood up and began to walk to the door.

“I think not.” Eagle pulled the revolver from his coat and pulled back the hammer. He pointed it at the Senator. “Sit back down.” The senator began to furrow his brow and glared at Eagle. Sweat was beginning to form on his brow. “I won’t tell you again Senator. Sit down.” The Senator turned and sat back down in his chair. “There’s a good man.”

“Fine, say what you want to say before I have building security up here arresting you for pulling an illegal firearm on me.”

“Very well then. As I was saying Senator, Section Thirty can survive without the Maintenance Men for a little longer. You will have the Senate approve a transfer of the rest of the inmates to my program as well. You see, The Maintenance Men have been dying off faster than before and we’ve become shorthanded.

“Shorthanded? Maybe it’s time for your program to end Eagle. You have been clinging to life both for yourself and this program for decades. It’s time for The Maintenance Men to end Eagle and its high time you accepted that.”

“Okay Senator, let’s play a game. One of my favorites form way back. The boys would get bored or become depressed and they would play this game as a way to alleviate it or settle a disagreement.” Eagle lowered the pistol and opened the cylinder again turning it so the Senator could see it. “One Bullet, Two men.” He spun the cylinder with one hand and slammed it shut again.

The Senator leaned back in his chair staring at the elderly Eagle and the gun in his hand.

“You must be joking?”

“No, I’m not joking,” He pointed the gun at the Senator. *Click* “Lucky man. My turn.” He pointed the gun at himself. *Click* “Look who else is lucky today. I hope it holds out.” He pointed back to the Senator.

*Click*

Himself

*Click*

The Senator

*Click*

Himself

**BANG!**

Eagle slumped over in his chair. The Senator jumped in surprise. After regaining some control over himself he bolted out of his chair and fumbled with his keys trying to unlock

the door. He could not remember which key unlocked his door and he cycled through them quickly. He tried the last one but dropped them on the floor. He picked them up quickly forgetting which key he had left to try. He started over again but dropped the keys again. His hands would not stop shaking. He stopped suddenly and felt a sharp pain in his chest. He looked down and saw a thin silver blade sticking through his chest. He felt the blood invade his throat and mouth coughing some of it onto his pristine white suit shirt.

“That didn’t go exactly as planned but I’d say I still got the outcome I wanted... To an extent.”

“E...Eag...Eagle?”

Eagle pulled the blade from the Senator and let the man crumple to the floor. He looked at the Senator who was leaking blood onto the carpet and into the crack under the door.

“Triangular wound Senator. Impossible to stitch up. Sorry, friend.”

Eagle slid the blade back into his cane and hobbled to the Senator’s chair and sat down.

He felt the bullet hole in his head began to close forcing the lead out of his skull and onto the floor next to him. He placed the cane in between his legs and held the crook with both hands looking at his handiwork.

“This has been a good day.”

He leaned back in the chair and lit a cigarette.

### **Crew 55: Ice Chills the Bones**

“What is going on?”

“Are these reports confirmed?”

“What happened to Sections Seven through Thirty?”

“How far have these things advanced?”

“Where are the Generals?”

“Has anyone been deployed?”

“Where is Councilman Ninety-Eight?”

A loud banging was heard in the large Council Chamber. All of the members looked up at the Chairman. He continued banging his gavel on the table until everyone was silenced.

“Members of the Council. This aimless panic talk will not get us anywhere. We must handle this calmly. The people look to us to govern calmly and with right mind.” He looked at the members, “Now, there have been reports of creatures running wild in the streets. Let us look at this logically.”

“Logically Chairman? What logic can be applied to this? Monsters have overrun Sections One through Thirty of the Complex,” said Councilman Forty-One.

“We must deploy a military force to the area to at least confirm these reports.”

“Yes. We need eyes and ears on the ground.”

“I have already put in a request with the Maintenance Men division.” The other Council members stared at the Chairman. “They have already deployed a crew to look into the situation. We should hear back from them soon.” The Chairman sat back down and watched the other members of the Council. “Now, should the reports be true we will deploy the army to evacuate civilians and should the need arise I will authorize the army to conscript the able bodied. All in favor?”

The councilmembers all pressed buttons on a small keypad in front of their seats and the Chairman looked down at the screen embedded in the desk. He watched the numbers climb slowly as some members could not decide on the course of action partially taken by the Chairman. He sat patiently waiting for the results to be calculated. The screen beeped. The Chairman looked down.

“Eighty-Three in favor. Seventeen against. I voted in place of Councilman Ninety-Eight due to his absence. The motion passes. We will continue in this course of action.”

## 2

The members of Crew Fifty-Five were an isolated bunch. The three members had relatively little contact with other crews and they often preferred to work alone when it came to repairs that may have required a team up with another Crew. They often played cards or picked on each other to pass the time when they were not indulging in their hobbies. Sour often hoarded candy and would munch on it while cleaning his weapon or maintaining the buggy. Glory would revel in his past accomplishments before his time in

the Maintenance Men by looking at old photos. Acid would play around with a small chemistry set he managed to get into the Res-Box using the Substance and Item Network in the Tunnels.

Sour sat next to the pneumatic tube. He looked up as the light on the tube began to flicker to life. He heard the cylinder smack the bottom of the tube and the small door slid open. He grabbed the container and opened it. His eyes squinted at the letter inside. It was written hastily and in messy hand but it had all of the proper authorization marks. He walked over to the fire pit in the center of the room.

“We have a job and its time sensitive.” The others looked up at him. “Get moving we’re going out alone.”

“Finally, a job just for us,” Glory mumbled.

“Right on. I can’t wait.” Acid said while clapping his hands.

They put on their gear quickly and opened the airlock door. They went to their weapons rack and picked up their respective weapons. Sour took an AK-47. Glory grabbed his favorite Shotgun, a Benelli-M4 with Slug rounds. Acid grabbed his personal SAW. They took the battery packs from the wall and attached them to their suits. They activated them and they opened the outer door and walked into the tunnels under Section Twelve. They had not been deployed in some time due to their effectiveness in their work. They walked in the ice covered concrete halls holding their weapons in a resting position.

“You never actually told us what we’re doing Sour,” Glory said.

“We got a request directly from the Chairman of the Council.”

“Whoa seriously?”

“The Council never directly puts in a request,” Acid said warily.

“I know. That’s why this mission is time sensitive. We need to confirm a few rumors that have been going around recently.”

“Those are?”

“You know how Crews have been vanishing or getting killed outright?”

“All of the Maintenance Men know about it. It’s got everyone pretty spooked.”

“Apparently, these disappearances have resulted in those creatures being able to add to their number.”

“What? Those things made more of themselves?”

“The letter said that they were able to escape the tunnels and have ransacked Sections Seven through Thirty.”

“Why haven’t we heard about this? If this is true, we’ve been sitting directly beneath them.”

“That’s what’s scary. They never came for us.”

Crew Fifty-Five continued the slow trek toward Foot Tunnel R-4. This foot tunnel had one of the few above ground access hatches in the tunnels. The Maintenance Men only had one way out of the Tunnels and it was the elevators in their Res-Boxes. The

access hatches were for absolute emergencies and could only be opened through a radio that led to Eagle's office. Eagle would need to receive authorization to open the hatches from the Chairman of the Council himself before a crew was allowed to access the surface without the Elevator. They passed through the access door to the Foot Tunnel and went to the ladder. Sour climbed up and stopped near the top and pressed the green button on a com pad by the hatch.

“This is Sour of crew Fifty-Five requesting access to main level for job number three seven nine six nine.”

“This is Eagle. Authorization Granted Sour. Opening hatch.”

The hatch opened and Sour climbed through followed by the rest of his team. The three men stood in the street and removed their helmets clasping them to the waist belt. They took a moment to enjoy the sunlight and the warm air of the surface; a stark contrast to the darkness and cold air that they had grown accustomed to. When they came out of their trance they looked around and held their weapons at the ready.

“Anyone else think that this is weird?” Acid asked.

“Yeah. Where is everyone? It's the middle of the day.” Glory observed.

“Were the people evacuated?”

“Let's move.” Sour stated.

They moved down the empty streets holding their weapons at the ready. Every street was empty. Not a single soul was to be found. The streets themselves were littered with papers, clothing, and some rubble from the buildings. Acid stepped over a shoe



while sour picked up the remnants of a T-shirt. Glory looked down at the road and stared at it. He could see a very light sheen and the reflection of the sun on the road.

“The road is wet,” he called to the others.

“I didn’t like this before,” Sour said, “Now I really don’t like this.”

They kept moving and on every street, it was the same. No human could be found anywhere, the street was littered with random things, and the road was consistently wet. Section Seven was not the nicest of sections in the Complex. It was fairly run down and had its own share of issues in the main level structures. While it was not a slum like Section One it was fairly close to one. It was filled with crime and desperate people doing desperate things in order to put food on the table; even if it meant breaking through the checkpoint gates into other sections because there was not enough to go around. The people here were consistently looking for work and needing to be in food lines. Crew Fifty-Five all grew up in Section Seven and were familiar with all of its faults.

They passed by the places where they remembered playing Basketball on the run-down court in the park. They passed by the ally way where they remembered many of the teenagers getting high. They passed by the bar where the adults would go to get hammered. They saw the old shoe shop where their parents would take them to get new shoes. It weighed heavily on them to see it so empty and desolate. There was not even a whistle of wind when they were used to hearing gun pops in the background and people shouting, cussing, and slamming each other into the ground. The only sound they could hear were their footsteps and their own breathing. They rounded a corner and saw

someone in a blue and red suit on the sidewalk stumbling around aimlessly. His belt was fully equipped and his battery pack was still attached to his back.

“What is another Maintenance Man doing here?” Acid asked.

“I’m not sure.” Sour replied. “Hey which Crew are you from?” he called out. The man did not answer. “He probably can’t hear me. He’s still got his helmet on.”

They approached slowly and methodically. They lowered their weapons slightly as they approached the other Maintenance Man. He continued to stumble around as though he were drunk. The man stopped when he saw Crew Fifty-Five approaching. Sour kept his weapon slightly raised and looked at the man. He looked at the red and blue suit. It was not in tatters but it was heavily damaged and it looked like the helmet had been thrown onto his head instead of placed there by skilled hands. The latches for the helmet were not in place and the helmet was slightly twisted to the right putting the viewing port off center. Sour eventually managed to see the crew number on his shoulder. It was faded but he could make out the number “75” on the shoulder.

“Your Crew Seventy-Five?” Sour asked, again no response. Sour thought for a moment and sucked in a breath. He pulled the trigger on his Ak-47. He held the trigger long enough for the weapon to fire two or three rounds, all of which hit the man in the suit. He fell to the ground with a heavy thud.

“What did you do that for?” Glory asked.

“Crew Seventy-Five is one of the Crews that was wiped out.” Sour responded.

“So what? He could have been human or a survivor.” Acid added.

The body on the ground began to move and it sat back up. Crew Fifty-Five stepped back quickly and fixed their weapons back onto the body. It reached up but was too slow to catch the men. Even though the helmet was still attached they could make out the faint sounds of groans coming from the inside the helmet. They trained their weapons back on it and all of them fired on the body. The echoes of the bullets being fired filled the silent air and the sound of brass casings smacking the road added another drum beat to the air. The suit was blasted full of holes and was torn away from the man's body. The man fell once more onto the ground and no longer moved. The remnants of the suit looked like they were deflating and water spilled from the suit. Sour pointed to Glory and then pointed at the suit. Glory nodded and pointed his shotgun at the body and prodded the suit with the tip of the barrel. There was not any movement from the suit outside of Glory's prodding. Glory signaled to the others and they came over.

"Definitely was not human," Glory stated.

"It was a monster wearing the suit of a man," Acid mumbled.

Sour knelt down and removed the helmet. A skull fell from the helmet and shattered on the ground. He used his fingers to brush aside the jagged fragments. Each fragment that his hand touched instantly disintegrated into water droplets. He stood back up and looked at his team.

"What just happened?" Glory asked.

"It seems that they cannot survive up here after they have been killed." Sour replied.

“But why is this one permanently dead while the ones we encounter in the tunnels get back up again and again?” Acid asked, lowering his SAW.

Sour rubbed his chin, “That’s the question of the day. If I had to guess, I would say that the temperature of the tunnels keeps them together both literally and figuratively. We should get back to the Res-Box and get this report back to the Chairman of the Council.”

### 3

Crew Fifty-Five traversed through the tunnels once more, both upset that they could not stay above and feeling as though they had been away from the tunnels that was their home for too long. They eventually made it back to their Res-Box without incident. They opened the outer airlock door and went back into the weapon and vehicle storage placing their weapons back onto the racks quickly before moving to open the inner door back into their Res-Box. Sour pulled the lever on the wall to open the door and when it was opened the three men ran inside.

“Welcome back Crew Fifty-Five.” The three men stared. An elderly looking man sat in a chair by the fire pit smoking a cigar. “The Chairman sent me down here to get the report from you. Doesn’t trust the usual method apparently.”

“You’re Commando, right?” Glory asked.

“The one and only. Eagle wanted to come down here himself but he had other things he needed to do.”

“Do you have the authorizations from the Chairman for us to give you our report?” Sour asked.

Commando reached into his jacket and pulled out an envelope. He held it out to Sour who took it slowly. He opened it and read the letter inside. It too had all of the authorization marks and stamps.

“Happy?”

“Yeah. Thank you. Protocol and all that.”

“I get it. Considering Eagle and I made the damn protocols,” he took a long drag on the cigar. “Anyway, let’s hear it.”

Sour saluted, “We have discovered that the rumors regarding the creatures is true and we have discovered a way to permanently kill them.”

“You found a way to keep them dead? Please say how.”

“Sir! On the surface, they are weakened by the natural heat of the dome. They cannot rely on the cold to keep themselves physically together nor does anything remain after they have been killed because their bodies melt away.”

Commando thought for a moment. He puffed on the cigar in his mouth. He scratched his head briefly and stood back up.

“Does anyone else know about that yet?”

Sour looked confused for a second before straightening again.

“No, sir. Just we know about it.”

Acid and Glory began to slowly move away from Sour and back to the inner air lock door. They watched Commando closely and watched for any signals given by Sour with the hand by his side. Commando saw this and pulled out his silenced .45.

“Where do you think you two are going? Get back over here.” Acid and Glory moved slowly back to where Sour was standing. “You three have a choice now. Surrender or I kill you. A simple and often very overused choice I know, but it still applies.”

“What’s going on *Sir*?” Glory asked.

“Things beyond you and bigger than you. Now then what is your decision?”

Sour rushed Commando and tried to tackle him. Commando staggered allowing the grip on his pistol to get looser. Acid ran to help Sour take down Commando while Glory went for Commando’s pistol. Sour and Acid managed to wrestle Commando to the ground and Glory grabbed Commando’s pistol after it was released from Commando’s grip. Acid and Sour jumped back and Glory fired a round into Commando’s head. Glory stood there paralyzed.

“I just shot an officer.”

“Easy Glory,” Sour said panting and getting back up from ground. “You did what was necessary. He threatened to kill us this was self-defense. Although I don’t know how this will work out in an actual trial.” The three of them stood there for a minute processing what had just happened. Sour moved toward the pneumatic tube to write and

send the message to the Chairman. The three men heard a whooshing noise and Sour toppled over clutching his leg, now missing a portion below the knee that was smoking and stinking from the now cooked leg muscle. The three looked over and saw Commando holding an Arc energy pistol in his hand. Acid ran over to Sour and knelt down to try and help him.

“That hurt you ingrate.” The three men looked back down to where Commando was lying. They watched as he opened his eyes and began to sit up. Eventually getting onto his feet. “Honestly, that was not necessary. A ‘no’ would have sufficed.” Commando moved over to Glory who was still in a state of shock and grabbed him by the throat. He threw Glory to where Sour was lying and Acid was kneeling. “Well you made your choice.”

Commando’s body began to crack open and they could see his bones moving and twisting beneath Commando’s skin. He began to get taller and his arms longer. His body began to decay in front of them. His hands became claw like and his feet did as well. His lips and teeth had disappeared and in their place, was a line of sharp pointed icicles. His eyes became empty black pits save for a dull yellow glimmer coming from the sockets.

“Run!” Sour ordered, Acid lifted him over his shoulder.

Crew Fifty-Five ran and hobbled back into the airlock and pulled the lever to close the door. The door began to shut and Commando had not moved because his body was still in the midst of its transformation. The men grabbed their weapons off of the wall again and watched as Commando began to bang on the massive airlock door.

“What do we do Sour?” Glory asked.

“You need to run and try to escape into the Tunnels.”

“Are you serious? Our batteries won’t last long enough. We’re dead either way!”  
Acid said. “And what about you man? We can’t leave you down here.”

“With this leg, I won’t get very far. Would rather freeze to death in the tunnels or be killed by Commando, or whatever it is?” Sour asked. “Seal your suits we go into the tunnels.”

Acid looked around and saw the buggy with a small carriage. “Sour you can keep us covered in the buggy’s wagon.”

“Fine, load me up and get yourselves in and lets go.”

The others latched their helmets and turned on their battery packs. Commando had stopped banging on the air lock wall and it was quiet on the other side. Taking advantage of the respite Sour opened the outer airlock door. He turned around to see that the inner airlock was also opening.

“Damn, Commando opened the door!” Acid yelled.

“That makes things worse; it means he still has a brain. He’s not mindless. Slide under the door let’s go!” Sour commanded.

Acid went first and managed to slide himself under the door as it opened. Glory crouched under quickly followed by Sour who pulled the lever on the outside of the door to close it again to slow down Commando. The three men ran off into the tunnels that they knew well, their backs to Commando’s roars.



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