

Hydrolyzed Winter

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Introduction

A chilled wind blows snow down the street in a wisp and swirl like motion; it smashes against a wall and explodes in every direction, falling onto the piles of perfectly preserved human remains laying on the frozen ground. The year is 2091, and there are still breathing, slightly warm human bodies roaming the emotionless wasteland called Earth. Back in the year 2036 an event happened that would change everything, for everyone. They called it 'The Big Freeze'. Top scientists and government officials at the time were saying the sun's rays finally became too weak to push their way through the clouds in our atmosphere due to the many years of polluting the skies with sulfate aerosols (a collection of fine solid particles of a sulfate in the sky that create a reflective surface that shoots sunlight back out into the void of space). The prolonged exposure of these chemicals to the planet on a mass scale caused a cooling effect on the planet Earth, and a global blackening. It interfered with the hydrological cycle by reducing evaporation. The planet slowly froze over the next fifty five years, producing a large acidic snowfall roughly once a month. Due to the pollution in the air, and the extreme cold, ninety five

percent of the human population had died or froze to death, leaving roughly three hundred and fifty million people left to try and live out a life in the frozen wasteland.

Most of the warm bodies left stay indoors and live out the rest of their lives hooked into VR (virtual reality). Too afraid to face the cold they "*drop in*" with a drug program called '*Bright Blue*'. The synthetic programmed drug that overrides your sensory inputs and imitates the effects of LSD, a drug that was banned in 2019 worldwide after a man named Xavier Moore conducted studies using LSD and sensory deprivation tanks. He was able to get in contact with extraterrestrial biological entities, which he claimed wanted to help our planet to survive longer, but they had to remain a certain distance away from our planet for their own health and safety reasoning.

Unlike the '*Bright Blue*' junkies, there were still a small number of people that haven't given up on the planet yet. They wanted to try and reverse the effects of pollution and the aftermath of The Big Freeze. They wanted to save planet Earth.

Chapter 1

Claire was lying on the roof of an apartment building which was covered in soft, and cold white powder. She was inside of her small one person tent which was a light grey colour, and beyond over used. The zipper that held the door flap no longer worked and Claire's white hair spilled out of the tent and was lying on the snow making it almost invisible. She was catching a quick nap before leaving this building and checking out another one nearby. She was running low on supplies. All she had left was a few cans of food in her backpack. Through all of her travels she found it was getting easier to just walk right into people's apartments and take things while they were on Bright Blue, they didn't even know she was there.

There was one time, where she walked in on what appeared to be an emptied out apartment. The windows were shattered, glass thrown all over the floor. The yellow stained carpet was torn up and tossed around the apartment. There was garbage both in and out of bags that was scattered all over the place, and a dark wooden table was flipped over on the living room floor. There didn't seem to be anyone there, so Claire made her way in

further into the apartment. She walked as quiet as a mouse, praying a junkie wouldn't jump out and try to attack her. She heard a clicking noise that sounded like a door opening, before it had time to swing open, Claire spun around, pulling out her weapons from her coat, and she shot both of her 9mm guns through the door. Claire stood there for a few seconds with her eyes wide and breathing as if she just ran a marathon. Smoke slithered it's way through the bullet holes she had just made in the door. She heard the sound of something falling from behind the door as it burst open. A man sat there with seven gunshots in his torso and face leaning up against a wall inside of what appeared to be a small closet. He had a knife lying beside him next to his half open hand. He had taken his ComRig into the closet with him. He must have thought she was there to steal it from him. His now lifeless body couldn't have weighed more than one hundred pounds.

Disturbed Claire ran out of the disgusting apartment without checking it for supplies, as she ran outside into the cold, the tears falling from her light blue eyes froze to her pale, but rosy coloured cheeks within seconds. Almost nightly Claire would have nightmares about this horrible day. She would relive it like a movie. She could even remember the way it

smelled inside, like old cigarettes and urine. She thought about how long that man must of lived there all alone, and the paranoia that must have built up in his head.

Claire woke up from her nap gasping for air, reached inside her backpack and pulled out her Sunair ventilation mask that she forgot to put on before she passed out for her nap. Sunair was a small company that mass produced ventilation masks for commercial use in the cold. They take the cold air and through a small filtration system turn it into warmer air that will help your lungs live longer than if you were to just breathe the now crisp, frozen air of the planet naturally.

Claire had been wearing the same type of outfit since she can remember, replacing small articles of clothing as they wore out. She always had to wear layers because she was rather skinny and didn't retain lots of body heat. She wore a pair of faded black army issued cargo pants which were tucked into her massive black boots. Her warmest article of clothing was her trench coat, which used to be her mother's before she passed away in 2087. Underneath her coat she had layer after layer of shirts and sweaters to try and keep her core body temperature normal.

Before her mother passed away she taught Claire everything there was to know about GUI programming, manual coding, and robotics. It was her mother's field of work for many years. She never had a degree or held a real job, she did everything herself. Claire was very tech and street smart because of her mother. Her mother was the one who showed her the ways of living in the frozen waste world of today.

Claire slowly caught her breath after a very cold nap and packed up her tent. She took out her guns and went inside the building's rooftop entrance door, and began to make her way down the stairwell. She knew to take it slow and not work up a sweat, because that could kill you once the cold got to your moist clothing. She made it to the bottom floor of the building and went outside and began to look around. The world was so empty. Cars left in the middle of the city streets, the frigid wasteland of concrete and snow. There was always a haze of fog and darkness covering the horizon. A faint tint of green was the colour of the almost not visible sun through the clouds. It was there still, floating in space, but all Claire could see was a small dot of green light in a dark grey sky. Claire took out her tablet and checked her map application to see which way she was going to be going next. The GPS signal didn't reach the planets

ground level anymore due to the cloud thickness so you had to know where you were at all times and use the map like the old paper ones from a long, long time ago. Claire had only one thing on her to do list every single day she was still alive. Find the house of one man that might be able to help the planet and hope that she could figure out his research once she got there. She had to find the house of Xavier Moore.

Chapter 2

Claire was slowly walking out of the cold, dead city. Her legs began itching and shaking with each harsh wind that pushed against them. As she got to the edge of the city, that's when she spotted a deer standing in the middle of the road. Its short fur was covered in ice, and patches of the deer's flesh were missing as if someone or something had already attacked it earlier. The deer and Claire locked eyes as soon as it heard her boot crunching the hard snow beneath her. She didn't have the right equipment to hunt the deer but thought to herself that if she could get it close enough, she could use her knife.

"Come here" Claire said softly behind her Sunair mask.

She began making clicking noises with her mouth as if to lure the deer like a cat or dog. It shifted its weight onto its tiny little feet towards her, and began to walk slowly towards her; always keeping its eyes on Claire.

"Come on, you're almost here" she said.

"Hurry the fuck up!" she lightly yelled to herself.

The deer was now a couple of feet away from her and standing beside an old abandoned car on the highway Claire was standing on. Claire reached in her coat for her knife and lunged forward at the deer. Before her blade could make contact with deers' body she hears a loud gunshot coming from her right, that rang in her ears as if her brain was expanding inside of her skull, pushing against the bone. Before she could blink she was covered in small steaming spots of blood and muscle tissue, that froze within seconds. In shock she stood there for a moment, not sure if she should move or stay still. She came to her senses and quickly jumped over the car beside her, pulling snow from the hood with her legs and she glided over the hood and hid behind it. She took out her guns and kept an open ear. Claire heard footsteps approaching, crunching in the snow. She wanted

to wipe the frozen blood and guts off of her face but she didn't dare put down her guns right now. As soon as the footsteps got close enough she stood up quickly, while still taking cover behind the car and screamed.

"Stop!"

There was a white man standing there with what appeared to be frostbitten cheeks and a large rifle with a scope on the top of it. He was wearing a large white trench coat that was filthy and covered in blood stains. Claire could see he had a black beard behind his Sunair ventilation mask. He quickly drew his gun and aimed it back at Claire.

"I don't want to hurt you, but I will if you don't let me go!" Claire yelled at the man.

"Listen, lady, I don't have any intention of harming you, I'm just looking to get myself some dinner" he said.

"How do I know you're not going to pull something if I put my guns away?" Claire asked.

"Okay here's what we'll do, I'm going to throw my gun away behind that car over there. The only other weapon I have on me is a knife which I need to cut open this deer before the body

freezes. You technically helped lure it over here so I could kill it, so you're more than welcome to have some of it. By the way, my name's Matthew, Matthew Osbourne, what's yours?"

Claire stood there in shock and fear for her life. She had flashbacks to what her mother always taught her, which was to trust no one, and keep moving, but there was something about this guy that made her feel that she could trust him. Claire put her guns down, but kept them in her hands. Matthew threw his gun away just as he said he would do.

"My name's Claire" she said.

"Claire, that's a really great name. Care to join me for dinner?" Matthew said.

"Might as well" she said.

Matthew was over six feet tall compared to Claire's tiny five foot five self, and he had quite the amount of muscle power over her as well. He threw his bag at her feet and said

"Take whatever you want or need from it, seriously."

Claire was wondering why this complete stranger was being so nice to her, but she was hungry and lonely so she looked in the bag roughed up bag he through at her feet.

"There's nothing in here but a few cans of food and a small medical kit, I have pretty much the same stuff." She said.

"There is an extra pair of gloves in the side pouch if you want them, I noticed yours are looking a little worn and torn." Matthew said.

"Listen, I'm just trying to make friends out here, I don't expect you to trust me, but I will not harm you Claire, you have my word."

The two of them walked over to a nearby store that had been abandoned and destroyed but it got them out of the biting winds of the open streets. They started a small fire and cooked some parts of the deer's meat. Claire was getting a caretaker/ fatherly vibe from Matthew but didn't really want to get to know him, just in case she had to kill him, she didn't want to add the list of nightmares she was having. She ate some deer meat

with him with her back to a wall, one hand ready to grab her gun.

"So what's your story Claire? Making your way back to family or something? You seem pretty young to be out here on your own, you must be quite the tough cookie."

Claire nervously laughed and her mind raced to decode what he meant by that. Did he think she was alone out here and that would make it easier to attack her while she was sleeping? Did he want to hurt her? Or was he just asking to be polite?

"Um, well I have friends in all of these buildings; I was just taking a walk to clear my head for a bit. I should be getting back now anyway."

"Okay Claire, well it was nice meeting you, and thanks for helping me catch that deer." Matthew said

"Yeah, no problem, have a good life dude." Claire replied.

She picked up her backpack and a small portion of the deer meat and took off down the street, and hid quickly inside one of the hundreds of abandoned buildings.

Claire waited to see if Matthew would start creeping up behind her and following her every move. Either she lost him, or

he wasn't coming after her like she thought he might be. She felt a sense of relief rush through her bloodstream like heroin. Just as she was exhaling a sigh of relief, she was grabbed by her hair from behind and had a knife placed on her throat.

"You fucking move without me telling you to and I'll slit your pretty little throat faster than you can scream! You got me bitch?"

Claire nodded her head in agreement and slowly walked backwards with this unknown person guiding her every step. Listening to the voice of the person behind her, she quickly came to the conclusion that it wasn't Matthew.

She was pulled deep into the middle of this building, down an endless array of hallways, and she wasn't even paying attention or thinking of how to escape. The main thing on Claire's mind was the cold metal blade being pressed against her bare skin of her neck. She couldn't tell if the blade was cutting her yet or not because her exposed neck was so cold.

"Get in here bitch!"

Claire was spun around violently and thrown into a dark room with what looked like ComRig systems for jacking into VR.

Claire could now see the man that had attacked her. His silhouette stood in the doorway holding one of her guns from her pocket, his knife, and her backpack was at his feet. His face slightly illuminated by the ComRigs in the room, Claire could see his wide eyes staring into her soul.

"Get hooked in bitch, I'm going to take you for a wild ride, I haven't been with a chick in a good long while."

Claire's eyes widened at the thought of this piece of human waste even being in the same room as her.

"I'm going to be back in twenty minutes with some friends of mine sweetheart, you better drop in before we get back!"

He slammed the door and she heard locks from the outside. With very minimal lighting she looked around the room for anything to use as a weapon. The best she could find was a beer bottle that had the bottom of it smashed. She waited, for what seemed much longer than twenty minutes, behind the door for the Bright Blue addict to come back. Claire could tell by looking at certain people if they were addicted or not. They all had the same black rings around their eyes, weighed about a hundred pounds from lack of eating and were always violent.

Some time passed and she heard some footsteps in the hallway, slowly approaching her door. This is it, she thought to herself. She was waiting for the door to open, and that's when she heard gunshots. They didn't seem to ever end. She got a weird ringing sound in her ear and her head hurt after hearing it. She remembered that she had felt this way before. A few moments later the door to the room was kicked in and fell to the ground creating a dust cloud in the room that smelled like old books that have been kept in someone's basement for too long. In the doorway the silhouette of Matthew was standing there holding his large gun.

"Claire, are you in here?" he yelled.

"Yeah I'm over here" she said with a scared and soft voice.

"Come on let's get you the fuck out of here!" Matthew said

"He has all my stuff" Claire replied.

"It's all out here in the hallway, come on." Matthew said quickly.

Claire and Matthew went to the hallway and picked up all of her belongings from around the dead and blood covered bodies of

about seven Bright Blue junkies now laying out in the hallway. They ran out of the apartment building.

"Come on Claire, I have a safe house just up the road!"

Claire was pretty sure she was in safe and caring hands at this point, and didn't want to be alone after what just happened so she decided to go with Matthew down the street to his safe house.

Chapter 3

A large blue metal door grinds open and Matthew and Claire quickly shuffled into the safe house. Claire could see her breath in the glow coming off about ten nearby monitors of various sizes.

"You're lucky I followed you" Matthew said.

"Yeah, thank you" Claire replied.

Matthew made his way over to a light switch and clicked it upwards. The clicking sounded like an ax chopping into wood, and

the flickering glitches of fluorescent blue light made Claire's eye hurt, shooting a sharp needle like pain into the backs of her eyes, as if she had a headache.

Once the lights kicked in, she had a look around the place. The coolest aspect of Matthews place was his ComRig setup. You could see the powerhouse was sitting on top of a handmade metal table that could probably hold around a hundred elephants. Also on the table were nine monitors, some displaying VR rooms, others showing live footage of security cameras outside of Matthews' safe house that they were currently inside of. The ceilings were at least twenty feet high; this must have been a warehouse back in the day. Besides the amazing tech, Matthew had heaters all over the place, a motorcycle that was painted jet black, shelves upon shelves of canned food that was probably way beyond its best before date, and a small bed on a metal platform raised about ten feet off the ground, which you had to climb a ladder to get to.

"I would hate having to climb something just to be able to sleep" Claire said jokingly while pointing at Matthew's bed.

"Yeah it's a fucking pain in the ass but the air is a little bit warmer up there so it helps me sleep." Matthew said.

"Watch out for a second" Matthew asked Claire as he walked past her to lock over ten deadbolt locks on his main door.

"You'll notice if you look around, all the windows have been bolted and welded shut from the inside with six inch steel. The front door has probably more locks than its needs, but that's okay, it's going to stay like that." Matthew said jokingly.

"I have a small locker beside my bike over there filled with different guns and ammunition, feel free to take whatever you need; I'm always finding that stuff everywhere nowadays."

"Wow, did you do this all by yourself?" Claire asked while gazing around the large room.

"Yeah I did, a couple of years back, I needed a new place to call home, so this is it." Matthew said.

"I'm going to have to go back to that building tomorrow and see if those scumbags left anything laying around that might be useful to me, you're more than welcome to stay here while I do that, but you're free to leave whenever you want, I don't want you to feel like a prisoner or anything like that." Matthew stated.

"Oh, okay yeah, that's cool, um; I guess I'll just hang out here while you do that, if that's okay?" Claire stuttered through her teeth.

"Yeah that's fine, make yourself at home Claire, and stay as long as you'd like. There is no way anyone is getting in here so you can let your guard down a little and try and relax" Matthew said.

Claire knew she couldn't let her guard down, not even for a second. Her mother's rules for survival were already being tampered with just by being in this locked and bolted room with another person. Claire felt the warmest she'd felt in years, and not just physically because of the heaters, but mentally as well. There was a calming quality about Matthew that she just couldn't put her finger on, but even though he looked like a large scary guy, he was being really nice to her, and she was enjoying the realness of his human emotions towards her, something she hadn't felt in a long, long time.

"Hey can I use your ComRig to look something up really quick?" Claire asked.

"Um, yeah sure just don't close anything, and don't open the folder called 'Solana+1' please, it's personal." Matthew replied

"Oh Solana eh, is that some female mod you made for VR in your spare time or something?" Claire said jokingly.

"No, just leave it alone please." Matthew replied back quickly in an aggressive tone.

"Oh, alright, sorry Matthew I didn't mean to upset you" Claire said quickly with fear that he might become aggressive towards her.

Claire sat down at his ComRig and shifted her eyes around all of the monitors and random papers and trinkets all over his desk.

She pushed her neck out bringing her eyes closer to a small piece of paper that was taped on the front of the main monitor. It read 'You've such a lovely temperature'. Claire scoffed out loud upon reading it, still feeling the cold in her tiny finger tips.

"What does this mean Matthew?" Claire asked

"What does what mean?" Matthew replied.

"This quote here about temperature being oh so lovely?"
Claire asked

"Oh that's a quote from an Ernest Hemingway book I read when I was a younger, that's all." Matthew said firmly.

"Oh, seems kind of dumb to keep the paper now, don't you think?" Claire said.

"No, I don't." Matthew quickly replied.

"Alright then..." Claire said under her breath to herself.

Claire reached into her bag and pulled out, and plugged in her five hundred terabyte Dexor chip with all of her collected information on where to find Xavier Moore's house. She knew she had to keep west for a good long while.

Once her chip loaded, the information shot out across all of the monitors, a collage of endless information that made it look like a conspiracy theorists apartment wall, with endless sheets of paper connected by strings and pins trying to find out the whereabouts of a single person. Or so she'd seen in a movie once.

Claire's mother had compiled endless data about Xavier Moore before her death. She was under the assumption that if anyone could help bring the old planet back, the Earth of blue and green, we would need his work above all. Claire had endless files on this man, but his work was never allowed to be shared publicly, so he and or the government would be the only people that have access to it.

Xavier Moore himself died back in 2044 from natural causes at the ripe old age of eighty seven. From what Claire's mother told her dying in your eighties was the average life expectancy before the 'Big Freeze'. After that you'd be lucky to push past forty.

Claire's eyes moved side to side across the dusty monitors gathering mapping information and double checking it with one of the only inner web servers still active. Back in 2024 NASA built a large 'Space Balloon' that was sent up flat, and filled once it was in space. No one is sure what it was filled with, but it was a gas of some kind. Its main purpose was to deliver internet wirelessly on a global scale.

There was that one server worldwide spreading endless information through the internet. Governments paid top dollar

for full country internet blocking devices, but people rioted in the streets and started using local illegal hardwired internet instead. Eventually all service providers shut down and the only way to get internet from Earth was to know someone with a private hosting connection. NASA's balloon was useless once the 'Big Freeze' happened. The thick clouds in Earth's atmosphere won't allow for a signal to get past it.

At that point, and every day since then a few people worldwide have set up private hosting sites, from this city, you can only access one of them. Claire was using it to recalibrate her map on her tablet and update it. There were some good people out there still, updating online maps to tell you areas to avoid, and what roads are no longer useful if you're walking. Claire liked to check this as often as she could to get updates on the world around her.

"Fuck!" Claire shouted.

"What's wrong?" Matthew said worrying something had happened to his ComRig.

"I'm just looking at these maps online and this path I was going to take is just gone now, I'm not sure if its snow, or

just a sketchy area but everyone online is saying to avoid it like the plague." Claire said.

"Well how much time would that save you taking that way?" Matthew asked.

"It's not about time, I have all the time in the world, but I needed to hit up stores and houses along the way for supplies and now I'm stuck taking these fucking country back roads."

"Well what if I came with you and we took my bike, we can load a shitload of supplies onto it and I can take you as far as you need, as long as I can make it back here." Matthew said.

"Can we hang out in town for a bit longer; I have some places I still want to check out?" Claire asked

"Sure kid, take as much time as you need, for now I'm going to get some sleep, I'll see you in the morning" Matthew said.

"Night dude" Claire said softly while her porcelain white finger tips slapped the dusty keys of the keyboard.

Chapter 4

Claire woke up to the sight of a large silhouette of a person standing over her and she screamed at the top of her lungs and reached for her gun that was under her pillow. Her arm was grabbed quickly by Matthew.

"Claire it's me, it's Matthew, you're safe, you're okay!"

Claire's mind cleared and she was able to regain a grasp on currently reality in front of her.

"Oh fuck, sorry Matthew." Claire said while rubbing the rheum from her eyes.

"It's all good, I'm going to go ahead and guess it's been a while since you woke up someplace warm with someone else in the room eh?" said Matthew after letting her arm go.

"Yeah it's usually just me and my anxieties and fears about dying" she said jokingly.

Matthew laughed.

"Come on let's have some breakfast, do you like pineapple?" Matthew asked as he threw a can of sliced pineapples into her open waiting hands from across the room.

"Better than nothing" Claire said in a lethargic tone.

"So when did you want to head out on my bike?" Matthew asked.

"Well, there is this one place I one hundred percent need to check out before I leave this city, and that's building eight zero eight." Claire said in a demanding tone.

"Claire, you seriously want to go inside of building eight zero eight? That place is scary even in the day time, you know it's a hot spot for junkies right, it's like their fucking hotel?" Matthew asked aggressively.

"Yeah, but I'm still short on certain supplies that I need, and I know that someone in that building will for sure have exactly what I need" said Claire.

"Well what is it exactly that you need, because I have food, clothing, and an endless weapons cache? You're free to take whatever you need for your little quest." asked Matthew with a mouth full of pineapple slices.

"I just need to go in, you don't have to come in with me if you're too scared or whatever." Claire said in an insulting tone.

"No it's cool, I'll come in with you, but it would just be nice to know what I'm risking my life for." Matthew replied.

"I can't really tell you, you're just going to have to trust me, or stay here while I go." Claire demanded.

"Alright kid, Jesus, relax I'll go with you, just make it quick while you're in there that place gives me the fucking creeps, okay?"

"Sure." Claire said.

Claire and Matthew finished eating their pineapple slices and did some stretching and yoga to loosen up their muscle fibres, before they began to pack for the trip to building eight zero eight.

"Hey don't pack to heavy, just in case we need to book ass out of the building, you don't want a heavy bag slowing you down." Matthew said.

"Yeah I'm bringing an empty backpack and my guns, that's it. What about you?" Claire asked.

"Clothing on my body and two UDP-9 SBR's." Matthew replied.

"What the hell is a UDP-9 SBR?" Claire asked.

"These." Matthew said while holding up two guns that were smaller than his huge gun with the scope on the top, but still rather large.

"Oh, okay then." Claire said quickly after seeing the guns.

Matthew went over to his computer and checked the monitors showing the camera footage from outside his safehouse to make sure the coast outside was clear for them to leave.

"Alright it looks like we're good, let's go." Matthew said as he clicked a few keys on the keyboard disabling the security on the safe house.

Matthew ran over to the door and manually turned a large steel rod unlocking the door. Claire braced herself, but it wasn't enough. The rush of snow and spine crushing cold wind hit her like a ton of bricks. Her eyes squinted shut, her hands became balls of shaking adrenaline as the frigid winds shot through her body. She reached into her pocket while looking over at Matthew; they both placed their SunAir ventilators onto their faces and exhaled their last warm breath of air from inside the safe house.

Claire and Matthew stepped outside.

'The first step is always the worst. The way the snow crunches beneath my boots reminds me of bones being broken' Claire thought. Matthew turned around and shut the door behind them, and armed the security again via his handheld mini ComRig that he modified himself, or so Claire assumed having never seen one like that before.

"You ready to go?" Matthew asked muffled through his SunAir ventilator.

Claire nodded and they began the twenty minute walk over to building eight zero eight.

Claire's eyes were shifting all over the place at every little noise she heard and every little movement she saw from the corner of her eyes. It was snowing harder than usual and the frozen winds were blasting right into their faces as they continued to walk towards building eight zero eight.

The SunAir ventilators were having a hard time keeping the air warm enough because of how strong the winds were. Claire and Matthew finally arrived at building eight zero eight and were in awe at its size.

In front of them stood a one thousand meter tall building, the outside was matte black and had only a few tiny slots where there was some window. The entire building absorbed any little amount of light that hit it, making it stand out like a black hole if outer space was nothing but white light. Little mounds of powder white snow were built up along some of the edges of the building.

Claire and Matthew had never been this close to building eight zero eight, and they both felt very nervous about what they were about to do. They finished gazing at the black marvel before them, then looked at each other, Matthew clicked the safety off of his gun, and Claire pulled her two guns out of their holsters inside her trench coat before they began to walk inside the building.

They opened the first set of doors and the wave of unfiltered air rushed through their SunAir ventilators and stung them right in the back of their brains. They both had to take off their masks and try and catch their breath.

There was a wave of putrid vomit and urine, followed by a sweaty body odor that only exists on people that spend twenty four hours a day seven days a week sitting in a VR room while

they're body sweats out the mental effects of Bright Blue. This building was disgusting, and Claire already wanted to leave, but she had to find their main tech room first. After that first initial wave of stink hit Matthew he really wanted to know just what it was they were there to get.

"Claire, what the fuck is it that you need from in here, you're not one of these Bright Blue junkies are you?" Matthew said while gagging on air and coughing his lungs out.

"It's a part for my tablet that I need, I use this thing to help me get everywhere and I need to upgrade it, is that good enough for you?" Claire said aggressively.

"Alright Claire, let's just get this over with, where do we need to get to?" Matthew asked.

"The very centre of the building will have their main tech room, the part I need should be in there." Claire said.

"Okay then, let's get a move on, I'm assuming we have quite a few flights of stairs to climb?" asked Matthew.

"Yeah, and take out a flashlight, once we move from this doorway it's going to be pure darkness in here." Claire said.

"Fuck, alright let's go." Matthew said.

Matthew and Claire clicked on their flashlights that were attached to their guns and started to walk up the stairs towards the second floor, they had another four hundred and ninety seven flights to go up.

Claire and Matthew approached a door that read '214'. They were almost halfway there, when Claire heard a buzzing noise from behind the door.

"Quiet." Claire whispered to Matthew.

"What?" Matthew replied.

"Do you hear that buzzing sound?" Claire asked

"Yeah what about it?" Matthew asked

"We don't have to go as high as we thought." Claire said as she opened door '214'.

Peering down a long black hallway filled with dusty old tech, piss stained walls, missing ceiling tiles and giant piles of who knows what all over the floor, Matthew and Claire moved their flashlights around checking to see if the coast was clear,

in the distance a white anthropomorphic object rushed inside a room without a door.

"Did you see that?" asked Claire.

"Yeah get behind me." Matthew said while he aimed his flashlight and barrel of his gun down the hallway.

Slowly they walked towards the buzzing noise which happened to be the same room that thing ran into. As they got closer they started to notice a smell and a faint green glow coming from out of the room.

"What's that smell?" asked Claire.

"I don't know but it's more powerful than the piss in this fucking hallway whatever it is." Matthew replied.

They hugged the wall and slowly shifted towards the doorway with their backs to the wall. The smell kept getting stronger and stronger the closer they got to the room.

"Wait here" Matthew said extremely quietly under his breath.

Matthew quickly burst into the room and shot his flashlight all around until he was looking right at it.

In the light from Matthew's flashlight he saw a pile of about thirty dead bodies, all at different rates of decomposition, and a skinny junkie on top of them sucking the blood out of an arm from one of the bodies. The junkie stared right into Matthew's light with its glowing blue eyes and screamed like a banshee. Immediately he fired 4 rounds in the junkies skull and watched him drop, becoming another rotting sack of meat on the pile of bodies in the room.

In the distance the moans and screams of dozens of junkies could be heard, as well as the sound of their feet shuffling through puddles and piles of garbage in the hallways. Claire was standing in the hallway in complete darkness, terrified of the noises.

"Matthew!" she cried out.

"Claire, whatever you need to get in here, you better grab it now, like right now!" Matthew demanded.

Claire felt her way into the room and was guided over to the massive ComRig on the other side of the room from the pile of bodies.

"Matthew, what the fuck was it?" Claire asked while her lips shook from fear.

"It was just some junkie, focus on getting your part let's go hurry up!" Matthew yelled over the sounds of approaching junkies.

With shaking hands Claire managed to open up the ComRig and crawl inside of it. This ComRig took up a whole wall; it was the main powerhouse source for all the VR rooms being used in this entire building. Claire found the part she needed and disconnected it from the ComRig and crawled back out.

She placed the part inside of her bag and went to Matthew's side right away. Matthew fired his gun and sparks flew all over the room, the ComRig exploded in a series of sparks and small fires. It gave off enough light for Claire to see the pile of corpses behind Matthew.

Claire screamed.

"Come on, we got to get the fuck out of here, now!" Matthew yelled as he grabbed her wrist and dragged her out into the

hallway running back towards the door with '214' on it so they could get back down the stairs.

Matthew shot the light behind them to see a group of about fifty junkies all with bright glowing blue eyes running towards them screaming for the lost life of their VR rooms. Too scared to look back Claire kept her eyes forward and kept running.

Matthew's light was then in front of them trying to find the door back to the staircase when they spotted a few junkies at the end of the hallway in front of them. They were now surrounded by junkies and trying their hardest in the dark to find their exit. Matthew shot the small group of junkies in front of them and slammed through a door with his right shoulder. He quickly put his light on the door, it read '214'.

"Thank fuck." Matthew said while trying to catch his breath.

He shut the door behind them and they spent the next hour and twenty seven minutes running down stairs till they got back to the main building entrance. They quickly put on their SunAir ventilation masks and kicked open the door.

They lost the ability to see.

The white light shot to the back of their eyes like a thousand needles filled with hot sauce. Claire kept blinking and squinting until her vision came back. Matthew reached inside a pocket on his jacket and grabbed a pair of sunglasses and put them on.

"What? You never know when you might need them."

Claire scoffed and they ran down the street towards the safe house, not a single junkie left that building to follow them. Not a single one.

Chapter 5

Claire and Matthew made it back to the safe house in one piece, and got back inside. Matthew activated all of the

security locks and they both shed their outside clothes and dropped to floor from exhaustion.

"So you're good now right? You don't need any more of those small computer parts from million dollar ComRigs anymore?" Matthew asked jokingly.

"No I should be good now, I just want to sleep forever, and my legs are fucking killing me." Claire replied.

"Okay well let's get to bed and we'll figure out the rest of our master plan in the morning." Matthew said while placing his hand on Claire's shoulder.

"Whoa." A surprised Matthew said.

"What is it?" asked Claire

"You've such a lovely temperature" said Matthew.

"Why are you quoting that paper from your ComRig?" Claire asked him.

"Your shoulder is so cold, it's too cold, are you okay?" Matthew asked concernedly.

"Yeah, I'm fine" said Claire.

"Okay, how about this. I'll tell you something personal about me, and in turn you can tell me why your shoulder is so cold, deal?" asked Matthew.

"Your story better be good." She said.

"Okay well, you know that quote over on my ComRig that you saw, and I just quoted?" asked Matthew.

"Yeah" Claire replied.

"Well that was in an Ernest Hemingway book, as I told you. But what I didn't tell you is that I met my wife while I was reading that book in a warming camp back in 2057. She was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen in my whole life. Her name was Solana and she had long black hair and huge blue eyes, similar to yours. She asked me what I was reading, and we took turns reading each other chapters of the book. We must have read that book fifty times that first week. She told me her favorite quote from the book was 'You've such a lovely temperature' because even though the world was frozen solid, when she would lay with me in bed I always kept her warm."

"What happened to her man..." Claire asked without trying to be too intrusive.

"Well, back in 2062 we were moving from one location to a healthcare centre because she was pregnant. We traveled for days in the cold, stopping when we could, and we almost made it all the way there..." Matthew began to cry his heart out.

"Hey, hey, it's okay, you don't have to keep going man, this story is obviously upsetting you, let's just get you to bed dude." Claire suggested.

"We were almost there, and we... we got stopped in the street by a fucking junkie. That fucking piece of shit! We were almost there! Fuck! He thought she had something hidden under her coat that she was carrying, but it was just her stomach. After we said we didn't have anything I guess he figured if we weren't going to share we shouldn't have any of it either, so he sliced her stomach open with his knife." Matthew said through water filled eyes, as snot ran freely from his nose.

"Oh my god..." Claire said under her breath while she crawled over and embraced Matthew in her arms.

"I shot the son of a bitch in the fucking dick and he dropped right beside my wife, and I watched him die as I emptied my gun into his skinny little body. I dragged my wife inside a small abandoned convenience store and tried to put pressure on

the wound and wrap a scarf around it, but she was bleeding so much. I remember her looking around and telling me that she was dizzy and just wanted me to hold her. She kept screaming to save the baby but there was no way it would survive being delivered outside in the cold. I just kept telling her that I loved her and I'd take care of the baby no matter what happened, and that's when she said it."

"Said what?" asked Claire.

"That's when said the last thing she'd ever say to me, "You've such a lovely temperature." That was the last thing she ever said me, while holding my hand covered in her slowly freezing blood. I lost my entire life that day."

"Matthew, I'm so fucking sorry. I don't even know what to say right now" Claire said.

Matthew couldn't stop crying. Claire hugged him for a while until he pulled himself together and wiped all the tears from his face.

"You okay man?" Claire asked.

"Yeah, I'm sorry you're the first person I've ever told that story to. So it's the first time I've heard it out loud

since it happened. It's just super hard seeing the visuals of it all like a movie in my mind while sharing it with you." Matthew said with a raspy throat.

"Hey man it's okay, thanks for sharing that with me, seriously. You want to hear a couple of stories of mine?" Claire asked

"Yeah actually, you can start with why your arm is so cold." He said.

"Okay so back in 2087 my mom died. She was all I had and all I figured I'd ever have. She taught me everything there is to know about ComRigs, hacking, programming, and just living in this horrible frozen shithole we call home. She was a normal person and then she started to use Bright Blue, and slowly she began to turn into this whole other person that I couldn't even call my mom.

She was something else, her eyes started to do that glowing thing that junkies eyes do, and it just freaked me out. One night I got woken up and I was being dragged through the house by a couple of large men. I had no idea what was going on. They took me outside and threw me in the snow, and all I was wearing was a tank top and pants, so you can imagine how cold I was. It

turns out that my mother owed someone something, and they said if she didn't pay, they would cut off one of her arms, then a leg, and slowly take her body parts till she was just a head hooked into VR."

"Jesus fucking Christ, who did she piss off?" asked Matthew.

"I couldn't tell you. But what I can tell you is that they didn't do this to her, instead they figured that hurting her child would get her attention more, so they held me down outside and buried my arm in the snow. They waited until signs of frostbite started to show on my neck and shoulder before taking it out of the snow. Right after that they hacked it off with a fucking machete and just left me there outside on the floor."

"Holy shit Claire, are you a...cyborg?" Matthew asked not wanting to pry too hard.

"Yeah, I am." Claire said as she took off her sweaters and shirts to reveal a shiny metal robotic arm.

"This is what I needed the piece for; there is a small mechanism in my arm that attaches the biological to the

mechanical. It needs to be replaced every year. The only ComRigs that have this piece are the expensive ComRigs in buildings like eight zero eight. So thank you for helping me get the part, and I'm sorry that I had to lie to you. It's just not something I like to put on display for everyone."

"Claire, I think it's beautiful, and not in a creepy I'm attracted to cyborgs kind of way. In a, I think we're going to be friends for a good long while kind of way. You know my daughter would have been around your age by a couple of years if she survived that night. I'm really enjoying your company; it makes me feel like I have a part of my old life back, having just skipped a huge section of the middle of it" Said Matthew.

"I have to be honest with you, the way you've been taking care of me reminds me a lot of what my mother was like before she started dropping in with Bright Blue. So thank you for everything Matthew, seriously."

Claire and Matthew went to go hug each other and Matthew jolted up and screamed as Claire's metal arm was placed on his back.

"Oops, sorry" Claire said trying not to piss herself laughing.

Chapter 6

"You got everything you need?" Matthew asked Claire from the 'bedroom' of the safe house.

"Yeah we should be ready to get out of here within 10 minutes" said Claire as she was packing the last bit of food into her backpack for the trip.

"Are you sure you're okay with me taking all this?" she asked.

"Yeah one hundred percent, in fact you should probably pack a bit more than that." He said.

"What do you mean?"

"Well make sure there's enough for two people to last the whole trip." He said

"Wait, you're only taking me halfway are you not?" a confused Claire asked.

"No I meant what I said last night, I'm going to stick with you for a while, if that's okay."

"Um, yeah stay with me for as long as you can possibly stand me, please." Claire said jokingly while they shared a laugh.

Matthew came down from the raised bed platform and hopped on the bike. Claire got on the back of bike and her legs stuck out over all of the side compartments filled with supplies.

"You ready?" he asked her

"I guess so." She replied.

"Alright put your helmet on girl, let's blow this Popsicle stand."

Matthew and Claire put on their helmets over top of the SunAir ventilation masks and he started up the bike.

"Oh shit, I almost forgot!" Matthew got off the bike and ran over to his computer and grabbed the piece of paper with the quote on it and put it in a small pocket on his jacket and

zipped it up. He killed the security on the safe house and went over and unlocked the door.

There it was, that rush of cold air that just burst through the doorway sprinkling ice crystals all over the apartment.

Matthew took one last look around at what he assumed would be the most secure place he would ever live in for the rest of his life. He pressed a combination of buttons on his mini handheld ComRig, and ran to the bike.

"We have thirty seconds to get the fuck out of here." He said as he revved the engine and floored it out of the safe house and into the cold.

"What did you do?" she asked as they drove on.

Claire's trench coat was floating off the back of the bike like hair in the wind. They got one block away from the safe house before they heard and felt the biggest explosion they've both ever heard. Claire looked back to see that the where the safe house was, it now wasn't.

"Are you fucking kidding me, you had me sleeping beside that many explosives?!" she screamed through her SunAir ventilation mask and bike helmet.

Matthew shook his head and pointed at his ears if to imply he couldn't hear what she was saying, but the smile on his face hidden behind his mask and helmet said otherwise.

Matthew tore through the streets with his motorcycle. The extra thick tires could drive over pretty much everything and its small size made it nice and easy to get through all of the abandoned cars that were scattered around the roads like the snow that covered them.

Matthew had built wireless speakers into the helmets and started to blast Fear Factory's song Machine Debaser. He said it helped him drive better and Claire enjoyed the music.

According to Claire's map they had to keep driving along this big empty road just outside of the city for a long time. It would be days before they would get anywhere close to Xavier Moore's house.

Claire and Matthew stopped a couple of times to raid small houses in the countryside. They found one family that they assumed had shot their kids while they slept in their beds and hung themselves, based off the suicide notes they found. The house was so cold it was hard to say how long ago they did it. They managed to find more food and Claire checked her map online

on some of these peoples ComRigs just to make sure the road they were on was still good to travel on.

They spent their first night inside of an old gas station. There were endless amounts of expired chips and frozen candy bars.

"So what are you going to do once you get to this dude's house, you never did tell me why this guy has your attention so much?" Matthew asked.

"He was this guy back before the Big Freeze who figured out a way to contact EBEs using Bright Blue and sensory deprivation tanks. He claimed they wanted to help save the planet." She said.

"Well then why is everything covered in white stuff?" Matthew asked wondering why the planet was a frozen wasteland.

"Well, this all happened before the Big Freeze, they could apparently see that our planet was dying slowly, but they couldn't come close enough to help us out because our planet was too toxic for them." She said.

"Oh, I think I've heard of this guy. Some people I met a while back said they saw him in a town west of here walking

around in the streets helping people by giving them food and stuff." Matthew said.

"Well, they're wrong, he died back in 2044. My mom had endless files on this guy, so I know pretty much everything there is to know about him. My mom said the only way to get the world back to blue and green is with his work, so that's why I'm going to his house to see if I can find any of his research or work and do something with it to get the planet back" Said Claire.

"Well, it sounds a little crazy to me, but if you're set on doing this then I'd be glad to go with you and help out however I can Claire"

"Thanks Matthew, having you around is seriously one of the most comforting things I've felt in a long time, thanks for doing this with me" said Claire.

"No worries, let's get some sleep and we'll get up early and get on the road" Matthew said.

Claire woke up to Matthew shaking her violently.

"Claire get up we have to go, we have to go now! Grab your things hurry!"

Claire grabbed her bag and put her coat and helmet on and pulled out her guns, still not knowing what was going on. Matthew and her hopped on the bike and Matthew put it into electric mode, it would only power the bike for ten minutes but it made the bike silent so they could sneak away.

"What are we being so quiet about?" Claire asked quietly.

"There was a group of people walking up the path to this place, I don't want any trouble with them, so let's get the fuck out of here while we still have...never mind."

"You were going to say limbs weren't you, you asshole." Claire said jokingly.

"No, no, I was going to say hair." Matthew replied.

The bike slowly took off quietly through the snowy field, bouncing up and over small mounds of snow and ice, as they made it back out to the road without being seen.

They waited until they were a safe distance from the gas station they were staying at before clicking the electric power

off and revving the engine like a bat out of hell and powering down the street in a wisp of white snow behind them.

They drove for hours until they read a sign at the side of the road that had letters on it in red paint that read 'Xavier, Saviour'. They had just made it to Xavier Moore's hometown.

Chapter 7

As they rumbled into the town, Claire and Matthew drove to the last known address of Xavier Moore that Claire's mother had on her ComRig. They drove through what appeared to be a ghost town, but more so than most places. This place gave off a vibe, a real creepy one, as if someone was watching your every move from just behind a pile of snow, but when you would look, there would be nothing there.

Claire and Matthew pulled up in the snow covered driveway of the house. Its windows were still intact and the front door

was shut and there was a large red 'X' painted on the front door.

Matthew took out his gun and Claire followed suit. They took off their helmets and SunAir masks and they made their way to the front door and opened it, it wasn't locked.

"Hey lucky us, eh?" said Matthew.

"Yeah, let's go come on."

Claire stopped for a moment and took a look around the street; she couldn't shake the feeling that they weren't alone. The wind carrying light wisps of snow through the streets, somehow sounded more quiet than any city or town she had been in before, an odd stillness to the atmosphere.

They made their way inside the house and found that the inside was untouched, which was very odd to see in this day and age. Almost every single house or apartment Claire had ever seen and gone into, was broken into previously and raided for supplies. This house was clean and untouched. The walls were a light green colour, and the entire house had hardwood floors that were broken and cracked from the cold.

There was a large staircase right when you came inside the front door, with very intricate metal railings going all the way up to the top floor. Matthew went upstairs to check it out, and Claire stayed on the main floor.

"You still good up there man?" asked Claire in a whispered tone.

"Yeah the place is empty on this floor; three empty bedrooms not even a bed. What about down there?"

"Yeah it's empty here too" Claire replied.

"Okay so I guess we'll both go check out the basement together then?" Matthew asked as he walked down the creaking wooden stairs.

"Alright let's go" Claire said in a very lethargic tone.

"What's wrong with you now?" Matthew asked.

"Nothing I just really hope we find something in the basement because if not everything I know in life is meaningless and I don't know what I'll do from that point on. Everything my mom shared with me and told me about would have been a waste." Claire said.

"Alright well let's go check it out" Matthew said with a hint of optimism in his voice.

The two of them made their way slowly into the basement with only the small beams of light of their flashlights guiding their way. Everything was covered in dust and large sheets of plastic.

The basement was massive, and felt like it never ended. Way down at the far end of the basement they shot their lights on what appeared to be a large metal box that looked like a coffin from outer space.

"Claire, do you know what this stuff is?"

"I have no idea man." replied Claire.

"Is there lights down here somewhere I'm pretty sure my flashlight is going to die soon" Matthew said.

Just as he finished his sentence the lights came on. Claire and Matthew spun around with their weapons aimed, and ready to kill.

What they saw standing at the other end of the basement was a large robotic humanoid body with reflective green eyes that seemed to have just appeared over at the bottom of the stairs

without them hearing a sound. It stood about six and a half feet off the ground and had the number '87' painted in red on its chest plate. Its body was made out of silver and black metal panels and it didn't look like something you'd want to mess with.

"Hello there" the robot said.

"Um, hi there, sorry we just kind of let ourselves in this house, we'll get out of here now if that's okay" Claire mumbled through her lips while she stood in fear of her eminent death.

"It's quite alright that you're here. Do you know whom this house belongs to young lady?"

"Last I heard it was owned by a guy named Xavier Moore, but I know he passed away a good long while ago, so if this isn't his house I'll just go. We just came here to look for something, but I don't think it's here so we'll be on our way now." She said nervously.

"Do not fear me, I understand I that my appearance may be a little frightening at first, but I am what remains of Xavier Moore. My brain is inside of this robotic body, I transferred it

in here with the help of some of my neighbours once I knew that my time in a human body was up" said the robot.

"What are your names if you don't mind me asking?" said Xavier.

"I'm Claire and this is Matthew" she replied.

"It's very nice to meet you both, and Claire I see that you yourself are a cyborg." Xavier said

"Yeah how did you know that? Do you have like X-ray vision or something?" Claire said curiously.

"I can see your wrist, and it looks quite metallic." Xavier replied jokingly.

"Oh." Claire said as she pulled her sleeve back over top of her wrist.

"Wait, so you turned yourself into a cyborg that's like ninety five percent robot?" asked Claire.

"Actually ninety eight point seven six two five three seven nine four percent, but yes something like that" the robot replied.

"What's with the '87' painted on your chest?" asked Matthew.

"That is how many years I spent on this planet in my original body" the robot replied.

"How do we know you're not lying to us?" Matthew asked

"I have video proof showing the process on this ComRig over here, if you would like to see" replied the robot.

"Yeah we would" said Claire.

Claire and Matthew walked over to where the robot was standing beside his ComRig and he showed them on a nearby monitor the entire procedure from start to finish. The video was sped up a little so they could see the whole operation in about three minutes.

"Wow, so that really is you in there Xavier" said Claire.

"Yes Claire it is" he replied.

"Well then, it's nice to meet you sir, but I'm going to need your help."

"With what Claire?"

"Saving the planet."

Chapter 8

"What do you mean save the planet Claire? Are you familiar with my body of work?" asked Xavier puzzled that a girl so young even knew who he was, let alone about his work.

"Well when I was growing up my mother would tell me stories about you and the work you did. My mother believed in you, and based off everything she's told me, I believe you too. I believe you made contact with EBEs and I really do think they told you that they want to help this planet. I don't think it's too late to try and contact them again." Claire replied.

"And what's your take on my work Matthew?" Xavier asked.

"I've just learned about you and your work from Claire describing things to me a couple of times. To be honest it sounds a little far fetched to me".

"Ah, we have a skeptic!" Xavier said while laughing.

"I'm all for fixing the planet so no matter what count me in, but I am not dropping in with Bright Blue, ever." Matthew said firmly.

"Well if the two of you are able to offer me a helping hand in all of this, we might just have another chance yet." Xavier said.

"Okay great what can we get started on?" Claire asked with a smile on her face wider than the Grand Canyon.

"I have plans and most of the parts I need here to build a device that will be taken upwards above the clouds into the mesosphere of our planet. From there it would release a new compound formula I've been working on that works like microwaves on a smaller gamma level of wavelengths. It would slowly evaporate any and all ice like formations within the mesosphere and decrease the amount of water vapor that is currently helping the sulfate aerosols continue to be so strong within the stratosphere right below it. The device would take around one minute to finish neutralizing the surrounding particles within a two thousand mile radius. From there the rest of the planets skies would slowly start to open up and allow sunlight to begin to pour back onto our lovely planet as the chemical compound

spread like wildfire over the course of a few days." Xavier explained to Claire and Matthew.

"How the hell are we going to get it up there though, the air quality levels one you hit a certain point are lethal and extremely toxic." Matthew stated.

"Yes, this is my only issue, I have a plane in a hanger not too far from here and I could get it to a certain point into the sky, but going much higher the toxic air would begin to rot the plane before I could get it anywhere near high enough. We need help, and it can't be from this planet. The thing we want gone is in the sky above us and below the EBEs if they're still out there. If we can somehow make contact with them again I'm sure they'd remember me, I'm sure of it!" declared Xavier.

"Okay so are you going to drop in and contact them for help? Didn't they refuse to help us out back in the day because the planet was too toxic for them back then? How in the hell are they going to help us now, the planet is so much worse than it was." Claire said

"It's the only chance we have right now and I don't have very much LSD left." said Xavier.

"Wait, you have LSD here? How the hell are you going to do that without a human body?" Claire said, worried of the answer to that question.

"I've held onto some for years now just in case I ever wanted to try to contact them again one day. But the years went on, and the older I got the less comfortable I felt doing it. Then one day it was too late, I lost my human body, and now I can't use in my current body. If we're going to continue with this plan, I'm going to have to help one of you ease your mind into a meditative state, and you're going to have to try and contact them yourself." Xavier said

"Fuck that, I'm not touching that shit at all. If it's anything like Bright Blue I'm staying right the fuck away from it. I will not become the way my mother was towards the end of her life, I just won't." Claire said filled rage that the subject had even come up.

"Yeah I'm not really comfortable doing that sort of stuff." Matthew said

"Well lady and gentlemen, one of you has to. Claire I'm not sure if the LSD would mess with your robotic arm at all, but you're still mostly organic tissue so I don't see it being a

problem for us. But Matthew, I do think you would be our better choice for this." Xavier said to both of them.

Claire sat down on a nearby chair, her white hair glowing in the fluorescent skips of the basement lights as they flickered at odd intervals. She stared down at her feet and thought about her mother. She was a woman who spent her whole life trying to teach Claire to be a good person, and telling her all the wonderful things that Xavier could do to save the planet. Then she turned around and started using Bright Blue, and her whole world came to an end. Claire never wanted to be what her mother became. She wanted to be what her mother was, before the Bright Blue. She would have to ride the fine line between the two worlds, a line she wasn't sure she could handle, but was willing to try. She placed her hands on her knees and stood up looking over at Xavier's towering metal body.

"I'll do it."

Chapter 9

Xavier pulled out piles of blueprints and papers and scattered them all over the large steel table in the middle of

the large room that was the basement. Claire was blown away at how detailed everything is. He dropped a pile of metal parts and wires of all sizes and colours in front of Claire as well.

Xavier then walked over and turned on a ComRig and loaded up a programming file that holds the information that the device will need.

"Claire I'm going to show you how this device is put together and I'm going to show you how it works. We are going to need to a few more parts to make it work, but I know of a building nearby where you should be able to get them." Xavier explained.

"I'll go." said Matthew.

"Alone?" Xavier asked.

"Yeah, you can show Claire everything she needs to know and I can help out by going and getting what we need, I'm just going to need like a picture or something of what I'm grabbing because my memory is dog shit." Matthew said jokingly.

"Okay well these are the three parts we need; they should all be in a small room on fourth floor of this building. It's my old office building; you shouldn't run into any trouble in

there." Xavier said as he handed Matthew a ruffled piece of paper with drawings and written descriptions of everything he needed to grab.

"Okay you two have fun then, Claire are you okay with me going or would you prefer is I stayed?" Matthew asked.

"Well it's a little too late to be asking that now, don't you think? It's fine Matthew just be careful out there, I'll be fine here." said Claire.

Matthew picked up his bag, put on his hat, gloves and coat. Grabbed his SunAir respirator mask out of his bag and placed it on his face.

"See you guys in a bit." He said muffled under his mask as he climbed up the stairs to go outside.

As he opened the door one floor up Claire and Xavier felt the rush of cold air sweep through the house like a bad feeling you just can't shake. Claire's arm hair rose up and she felt a chill in her spine.

Xavier began to show Claire the inner workings on the machine, and how to place all of the parts together and what each one did. They built the device up to the point where they

needed one of the parts Matthew was going to be bringing back, and instead of wasting time Xavier decided to begin Claire's study into the world of meditation and sensory deprivation tanks.

"Claire, have you ever meditated before?" Xavier asked

"Yeah my mom used to make me meditate with her all the time. It never really did anything for me except for this one time. I almost had this weird like, out of body experience and I saw what looked like a small purple triangle glowing in the middle of the nothingness in my mind. Does that make sense to you?" Claire asked.

Xavier laughed. "Yes Claire, that sounds like you did something right. Come over here with me please."

Xavier and Claire step into a very small room. Xavier and Claire's bodies were close, and they barely fit inside of the room together. The walls are covered in large pyramids that appear to be made out of a soft fabric. The entire room is lit by a single red light bulb way up high at the top of the twelve

foot ceilings. It casts harsh and demonic looking shadows below each pyramid on the walls.

Claire was looking over at Xavier who looks scarier than usual under the red light. Xavier closes the door which appears to be very heavy and is also covered in the pyramids behind them and they are locked in. Claire quickly forgets which wall the door was on, due to all the walls looking the exact same now that the door was closed.

Claire can hear her heart beating throughout the room.

"The decibel rate in this room is negative ten." Xavier says to Claire.

"Why is my ear making a weird a noise?" Claire asked.

"When you're ears detect nothing, they are trying to find sound. What you are hearing is your inner ear actually trying to find a sound." Xavier replied.

"Now I'm going to step out of here, otherwise you'll be able to hear the inner workings of my body, and you are going to need total silence to focus on your meditation. What I want you to think about while meditating is the feeling of happiness, and I want you to picture a planet filled with people. The planet

should appear blue and green and full of life, even at night time. The other planets should be able to see us glowing through space. That is what I want you to imagine, okay Claire?"

"Yeah, I haven't done this for a while, so it might take a little bit. Um, can we maybe leave the door open, or wait until Matthew comes back? I'm sorry, but I'm really not comfortable being locked in here by myself, it's kind of freaking me out already and I'm not even alone yet. It also smells like rubber and dust in here." Claire said.

"Claire we need to get started on this, the sooner the better. There is a button on the wall inside that room that opens the door. Go ahead and test it for yourself." said Xavier as he closed the door.

Claire found the small button on the bottom of the floor and pressed it, and the door swung open letting the bright white fluorescent light pour in like snow covering a mutilated corpse covered in frozen blood.

"Does that help put your mind at ease Claire?" Xavier asked

"Yeah it's a little better knowing that it's there." Claire said through a sigh as she exhaled.

"Then may we begin your journey into the mind?" asked
Xavier

"Fuck it, yeah let's do this." Claire sat down with her
legs crossed and let her hands rest on her knees.

Her back was completely straight and her eyes closed.
Xavier stepped out of the room and shut the door. The silence of
nothingness rushed into Claire's mind, she took a deep breath in
through her nose filling her lungs with warm recycled air,
raising her shoulders and chest upward and then exhaled from her
mouths' dry and peeling lips.

At this point Matthew had been driving his motorcycle in a
small blizzard for around fifteen minutes. His goggles were
covered in snow and his SunAir ventilator mask was barely
helping anymore and he had no more filters for it in his bag,
they all blew up with everything else back at his safe house. He
could almost make out the building, when he hit something with
his front tire, sending him flying over the handlebars and
landing on a pile of snow a few feet away from his motorcycle.

With his teeth clenched and his eyes closed in pain, he sat
up where he had landed. He wiggled his toes and fingers to make
sure he didn't break anything, next up was his legs. Without

them he would die right there. He was able to stand after using a nearby broken down car to help get him to his feet. His coat was torn a little on the back letting the crisp winds attack his spine, but everything was fine with him other than a sore neck.

Matthew walked over to check on his motorcycle, and whole front rim and tire were completely destroyed. Someone had built a small wall across the road, made out of metal with large spikes covering the face of it. He saw a bit of his jacket on one of the spikes concluding what had cut it. Matthew looked around for a car that would run, and found nothing old piles of metal scrap filled with snow and dead bodies. He then concluded that the rest of this trek would have to be done on foot, a human's worst nightmare in world without sunshine.

He walked towards the building and was relieved to see it had windows and what appeared to be an automated android tour guide inside the lobby sitting and waiting for guests to arrive.

These were placed in most business office lobbies in the late 2020's to accompany foreign business people around the building and help translate during business meetings. The main goal was to make visitors more comfortable in a new setting. Studies showed that the androids helped business sales increase

by forty three percent in the small amount of time they had with humans before the 'Big Freeze'. Matthew was going to use that android to help him around the building, and find the parts he needed for the device back at Xavier's house.

Matthew snuck up to the building turned on his flashlight and went inside in the front door with his guns' safety off. Right away the android stood up and began to walk over to Matthew.

"Hello sir, how may I be of service to you? Please select an option on my chest screen."

Matthew raised his gun not trusting the android, then lowered it, took off his gloves and then selected the 'Map' function app on the touch screen.

"Where is the room you are to be in, sir?" the android said as a number keypad popped up on its screen allowing Matthew to enter the room number.

"Excellent please follow me to the Dr. Xavier Moore's Lab." The android said.

Matthew and the android walked to the other end of the lobby and got inside of a large elevator that could have held

about four cars. The number indicator said they were going up to floor four, but the elevator felt like it was going down.

"Are you sure you're taking me to the correct spot?"

Matthew asked the android.

"Yes Sir Dr. Xavier Moore's Lab on the fourth floor room four-zero-two." The android replied.

"Why does it feel like the elevator is going down then?"

Matthew asked.

"Dr. Xavier Moore's Lab is on the forth basement floor level sir. For you to even know it exists means that you have spoken to Dr. Xavier Moore yourself and he has told you about it. These are the instructions he has left with me. Very top secret work at this level." The android replied.

The elevator dinged and the android stepped out and to the side, signaling for Matthew to step out. Matthew could not believe his eyes. It was a large football field sized room, with over one hundred androids wearing lab coats, working with various chemicals and robotics.

Matthew couldn't believe his eyes.

The floors and walls were solid grey concrete and the entire ceiling was fluorescent lighting. Matthew went to open the door on the glass wall that separated the small entrance way off of the elevator into the lab, when the android stopped him.

"Sir you can't go in there." The android said.

"What are you talking about, you just brought me here, I need to get these three parts back to Xavier right away!" Matthew yelled at the android.

"I will have them brought out to you sir, the environment inside of that lab is not fit for a human. The chemicals inside of that room would suck the moisture out of your body within three seconds of you stepping inside of there. That is why Dr. Xavier has us doing the work for him." said the android.

"What exactly are you working on in there?" asked Matthew.

"We're working on the cure for the planet sir. We are studying ways to fix the snow covered planet, as well as how to grow food with new methods once we do get the planet back to where it was. We've also been trying to grow humans in hopes to repopulate the planet once things thaw out and the grass begins to sway in the warm winds again." replied the android.

"Holy shit so you guys are really going to save the planet then, aren't you?" Matthew asked with excitement.

"That is the plan sir. We still have not figured out a way to get any machine passed the toxic cloud formations within the stratosphere to be able to deploy our device in the mesosphere."

"Yeah, we're working on something right now that might help that, I hope." Matthew said.

A smaller android came out of the lab after going through seven decontamination chambers with the few pieces needed for Xavier's device. He was missing a lot of his outer flesh layer from working with the chemicals in the lab, but didn't seem to care.

"I believe these are what he was looking for, sir." said the lobby android.

"Yeah these look about right based off the drawings I have. Thank you both. Thank all of you, please keep going forever!" Matthew yelled with excitement.

"Will you be being picked up, driving your own vehicle, or would you like to take one of our self driving car or trucks we

have in parking garage on basement floor two?" said the lobby android.

"Yeah, I'll take a truck please." Matthew replied.

Matthew placed the parts in his bag and zipped it up tight throwing it back over his shoulders onto his back. He thanked the android who gave him the parts again and walked back to the elevator with the lobby android.

Once in the elevator Matthew asked

"So do you have a name other than android?"

"No but you can feel free to call me anything you like if it would make you more comfortable." replied the android.

"I think I'm going to call you Clairebot, what do you think? Matthew asked.

"I think it's lovely, sir. But why that name?" asked Clairebot.

"You just remind me of a friend that's very helpful and caring." said Matthew.

"Well alright then sir, I am now Clairebot should we meet again." said the android.

"Ha-ha! That sounds good Clairebot." Matthew said with a huge smile on his face.

The elevator got to the second basement floor and the doors opened. It looked just like the lab floor but without the glass separation wall and instead of a lab, there were endless brand new shiny vehicles that looked as if they have never been driven before.

"Feel free to take whatever vehicle you'd like sir, simply get in and hit the start button. It will ask you where you are going, tell it, and it will take you there." said the Clairebot.

"Wicked, thank you for everything you've done here today Clairebot. You're helping save the planet for a lot of people." Matthew said.

"And androids also, sir." Clairebot replied

"Ha, yeah them too." Matthew said as he walked down the rows of vehicles trying to pick something he wanted.

There was truck parked on Matthew's right that was jet black and stood out as a tough looking vehicle that could withstand the forces of the frozen world outside. He stepped inside and sat down in what would be the driver's seat. He

pushed the small black button on the dashboard, which was the only button on the chrome dashboard, and the car came to life.

"Hello, where are you going today?" said the car.

Matthew gave the car Xavier's home address and it began to drive. It drove to the elevators and then into the elevator with Clairebot inside of it. They went up to the main lobby and a small garage door opening opened at the side of the building so the car could get outside.

"It was really nice meeting you Clairebot, thanks again." Matthew said.

"Anytime, sir. By the way, that truck is now programmed to be yours forever. Treat it well." said Clairebot.

"Sounds good Clairebot!" replied Matthew.

The truck's window rolled back up and drove out of the building. Matthew could feel its brand new tires gripping the snow effortlessly. He noticed a sticker on the windshield that stated that all of the glass on the vehicle was bullet and shatter proof. Matthew told the truck that there was a wall blocking the path on a road up ahead and the truck decided to take another route. Matthew not having to pay attention to the

road was looking out of the window when something caught his eye. It was a person wearing an almost SWAT like outfit with a huge chest protector plate, standing almost six feet tall and wearing a large mustard yellow trench coat with a hood on it.

His entire body was covered up except for his eyes. Matthew could see them glowing bright and blue in the shadow his hood cast on his face.

It was a junkie.

Matthew had gotten a little freaked out but then remembered the car had bulletproof windows and felt a little safer. He was driving away from the junkie anyway, and there is no way it could catch up to him on foot. He went to look at the junkie again, but he was gone.

Matthew figured he'd be dead within a few days since the yearly acidic snow storm was on its way, and that junkie didn't look like he had a place to stay.

With the detour and all, the truck was able to get Matthew back to Xavier's house in record time. Matthew stepped out of the vehicle with his bag and shut the door behind him.

Immediately he heard a familiar sound, it was his motorcycle, parked a few driveways down from Xavier's house. Matthew pulled out his gun and put on his SunAir ventilator mask and slowly walked over, taking cover behind snow banks and parked cars.

When he got to his bike it was still running, but was lying down on its side. Confused as to how the tire got fixed and how it got here he began to look around for that junkie he saw back at Xavier's Lab building. He went to stand up and heard a footstep behind him. He then heard sound of a gun clicking and something making contact with his head. Then in a raspy deep voice Matthew heard someone say

"Let's walk pretty boy."

Chapter 10

Xavier was helping Claire out of the meditation chamber. She came out feeling like a new person, like she had purpose and a clear mind able to reach the EBEs when the time came.

"How do you feel?" Xavier asked.

"I feel like a million bucks to be honest with you. That room is pretty magical, I like it a lot." Claire replied.

"That's good to hear Claire, very good to hear." Xavier added.

In the middle of their conversation they heard the door open upstairs, and footsteps. They both assumed it was Matthew coming back, with or without the parts they need for the device. They turned around to find Matthew standing there with tape over his mouth, his hands tied behind his back, and a gun aimed at his temple. The man they both saw holding the gun to his temple was wearing a large yellow trench coat with a hood over his head. His eyes were glowing behind Matthew's head. They knew this was a junkie, and they feared for Matthew's life.

The man stepped out a little bit and showed his chest to Claire and Xavier. Strapped to his chest was an EMP device, which when activated would disrupt signals and probably destroy everything electronic based within a four hundred mile radius with an electromagnetic energy pulse.

"I'm sure you both know what this is." The raspy voiced junkie said while eyeing Claire and Xavier's robotic body parts.

"Yeah we do, what do you want? We don't have any of that Bright Blue shit here, so why don't you just get out." Xavier said to the junkie with a serious tone to his voice.

"I'm not here for the Blue man; I'm here for that nice body you got."

Claire took a step back in fear that the junkie was talking to her and gasped.

"Not you sweet heart, I'm talking to the cyborg looking freak with green eyes beside you. I want you're fucking body man. So you're going to take a little walk with me outside to that truck, and we're going to go to my place, and have my people take your little brain out of there, and put mine in instead" declared the junkie.

"Now just hold on a minute there junkie - "

"My name is Eric!" the junkie screamed overtop of Xavier trying to talk to him.

"Okay, Eric. Listen to me, I'm going to come with you, but I need you to let my friend go that you're holding onto, and the girl, just let them go through that door over there, and I will walk out of here with you with my hands in the air. No funny

business, you have my word." Xavier said while point towards the door that led into the quiet meditation room.

"Yeah alright, no fucking funny stuff though, otherwise..." Eric said while smiling and pointing his finger while tapping at the EMP machine attached to his chest.

Eric let go of Matthew and untied his hands. Matthew quickly ran over to Claire and stood in front of her. Claire went from feeling scared and vulnerable, to protected and safe within seconds.

"Claire, Matthew. I want you to take everything on that table and take it inside that room with you, right now. Do you understand me?" Xavier said aggressively.

"Yeah, we're working on it right now Xavier, just give us a second here." Claire said while Matthew ripped the tape off of his mouth, pulling out multiple beard hairs in the process.

Claire and Matthew got inside of the room with all of the blueprints, and pieces for the device, including the ones in Matthews backpack from his quest, and shut the door.

"Were you able to get the parts, or did that guy stop you and bring you back here?" Claire asked.

"I was able to make it there, but I think this guy followed me back here. I think he knew who Xavier was but just didn't know how to find him, and I led him straight here, fuck!" Matthew said, with anger in his voice.

"Listen, Xavier might be a hundred and thirty something years old, but he can handle himself, I'm sure he'll be fine." Claire said.

Outside of the room Xavier pressed a button, which activated a small speaker inside of the quiet room and he spoke.

"Claire, Matthew. I don't want any of you to come out of there until I say so okay? I mean it; do not come out of there. Do you understand?"

"Yeah we got it Xavier" Matthew replied.

"Okay, here we go..." Xavier said, as he pressed a small button on his arm that activated the basement sprinkler system. It wasn't for if there was a fire, it was if there was an intruder. An endless stream of dark green acid fell from twenty different sprinkler system nozzles in the roof and walls. Xavier's entire basement was being sprayed and coated with a

thick very highly toxic acid, burning though almost everything, including Eric.

Eric's face began to melt and his coat was quickly disintegrating over top of his armour. He ran out of the basement and out of the house screaming in agony. Xavier presses the button again to deactivate the sprinkler system, and begin the clean up procedure. A white powder and warm water spray out of the same sprinkler holes, cleaning down what remains standing in the basement.

Xavier's robotic skeletal structure is coated in a thin layered spray chemical that protects against acid based chemicals, but he was still slightly damaged on different areas of his body.

Three hours go by and the cleaning process is complete.

"It's safe to come out now." Xavier says to Claire and Matthew over the speaker system in the meditation room.

Claire and Matthew step out to see that the entire room has been sprayed in something.

"Oh my god what is that smell?" Claire says in disgust.

"It's the after burn smell of the acid that was sprayed down here, it's not harmful to you so don't worry." Xavier says as he lies on the ground on the other side of the table.

Claire and Matthew go over and help get Xavier back on his feet and bring out the parts of the device including the pieces in Matthew's bag and place everything on the table that is now covered in holes from where acid had sprayed.

Xavier, Matthew, and Claire stand around the table and talk about how the machine is going to work. They look at the blueprints and piece together everything over and over until they know it like it's the back of their hands.

"We're going to need to make contact sooner than later with the EBEs , we need to get over to my airplane hangar." Xavier says.

"Why the sudden rush?" asks Claire.

"Because Eric is going to come back, and he's going to be bringing an army."

Chapter 11

Claire, Matthew, and Xavier stare at each other waiting for someone to make a move.

"Okay let's do this, I'm ready." Claire said.

"Okay Claire, there are things you need to know about the sensory deprivation tank before you go in." Xavier said.

"Wait, we're not doing this thing in the meditation room?" Claire asked in a state of confusion.

"No, that is just a practice room for you to be able to get into the correct headspace. The sensory deprivation tank is down there." Xavier said while pointing down the long basement towards the cryptic space coffin that Matthew and Claire saw when they first entered the basement.

"Wait, you mean I have to get inside that? What is that thing?" asked Claire.

"Sensory deprivation tanks are large metal box rooms, filled with a few inches of water that is heated up to your bodies temperature. The water contains enough magnesium sulfate to keep you floating without you having to put in any effort. You're going to then drop the LSD and step into the tank naked

and the door will be closed. You will then start your meditation process and if everything works properly you should lose the sensation of being in a physical body. Allowing your mind to flow freely as you meditate and focus on the things I was telling you about before while you were in the meditation room." Xavier explained to Claire.

"What if I drown or something, and do I really have to be naked for that? What about my arm in the water, isn't that going to fuck it up?"

"No, I have a small amount of an epoxy spray that we can coat your arm in making it water and rust proof from the salt water in the tank. I have it sprayed all over my body, which is how I survived the acid spray down here."

"Okay I'm going to need a few minutes by myself before we do this thing, I need to relax a little and calm my nerves otherwise I'm never going to be able to let my mind go inside the tank." Claire said.

Matthew and Xavier walked upstairs to the main floor and kept a lookout in case Eric came back to the house.

In the basement Claire closed her eyes and emptied her mind of everything currently going on around her. The machines buzzing, the hydraulic noises in the metal tubes attached to the walls, and the fact that at any moment, Eric could be back with more people. Xavier came back down a few minutes later and asked Claire

"Are you ready now?"

"Yeah I think I am."

"Okay let's get that arm sprayed in the epoxy I have and get you you're drugs."

Xavier brought out what looked like a can of spray paint attached to some sort of gun that had three blue lights on the side of it with only one of them lit up showing the amount left inside the can. The clear epoxy spray coated Claire's arm in a thin layer of what looked like black paint. It dried within seconds of touching Claire's arm. Next Xavier brought out a small glass bottle with a white plastic lid. Inside of the bottle were six small pink pills called microdots.

"Each one of these are very old, and won't be very potent, so you're going to have to do all six at once and get inside

that sensory deprivation tank as quickly as possible, you understand?"

Claire nodded her head and began to take off the rest of her clothing while Xavier turned around to give her some privacy. Claire felt the cool air biting at each millimeter of flesh that was exposed from under her clothing. The feeling brought her back to lying in the snow outside her mother's house when she was younger.

Claire couldn't wait to be in the warm tank and away from the horrible memories. Approaching the sensory deprivation tank was what Claire assumed being dead would feel like, a ghost slowly wandering towards a box where they would spend the rest of their days as a physical being on this planet. She was sure she was going to die somehow by taking these drugs, and she was still very nervous about going inside of the sensory deprivation tank.

Claire grabbed the handle and opened the small door leading inside, steam rushed out of the box as the warm air smashed inside the cold universe around it. She quickly got inside and shut the door above her head. It was completely dark,

with only the subtle sounds of body moving in the water. Eyes open or closed, everything appeared to be the same.

Claire felt around for walls and ceiling and to see how far back the tank went. She was able to fully lie down on her back and not touch any of the sides.

When you're in complete blackness it's hard to tell if you've closed your eyes or not. Claire was sure had closed her eyes and began to think of her mother, green grass, and a thriving nature filled planet.

Focusing on her breathing techniques, she faded away into a higher state of being, and everything that was black, became white.

Chapter 12

Imagine yourself being in an infinitely imaginable white room. You look down and see nothing but your naked body floating in nothingness above another version of your body lying below you facing upwards. Your eyes focus on your belly button which begins to bleed; frightened you look up and see that you are now floating in space surrounded by hundreds of versions of yourself all spread out in a circular pattern.

This was the beginning of Claire's out of body experience while in the sensory deprivation tank.

In the middle of the circle there was a small green plant with its roots exposed, no soil anywhere in sight. Its leaves began to pulse with a bright green light, as the surrounding star light began to become multi coloured lines moving towards to plant through space-time.

Claire takes her mind off of the plant and looks up to notice that every single copy of her has a third eye on their foreheads, glowing blue like the junkies.

Slowly one by one the copies of Claire begin to disappear in the blink of an eye until it is just her original body floating with the pulsating green plant in space.

She slowly moves her body towards the plant as it's leaves cracked down the middle and opened up to reveal blinking eyes inside of them, one of the eyes continues to grow until it explodes in a sea of green light and swallows Claire inside of the plant.

Scared she looks up and sees the stars slowly fading away as she is left inside of a blank, now grey space, floating still.

Claire looks down at her feet and realizes that there is some sort of rock formation on a ground surface that is approaching fast.

Back in the sensory deprivation tank Claire's real body is convulsing and twitching while she lies on her back in the salt water. She begins to vomit from the falling sensation filling her mouth and pouring out into the water of the tank.

She closes her eyes in her vision just before her body makes impact with the ground. Opening her eyes she finds herself

in the middle of a circle of Extraterrestrial Biological Entities that appear to be about ten feet tall, humanoid beings with purple skin, wearing white cloaks with a black pattern on them. Their skin was glowing purple, as one of them stepped forward and handed her a small green ball of glowing light.

As the EBE backed up into the circle it bowed to Claire, the rest of them followed suit. Before Claire had a chance to look at the orb of green light more closely, the ground below her cracks and she is pulled underwater and down what appears to be an underwater road, backwards, as her eyes catch a small pink orb descending in the horizon.

To each side of Claire there are pink crystal towers that are pulsing waves of blue light outwards into the water. She can barely focus on them because she is being pulled backwards so quickly, but she can see the blue light pulses that are being shot out of the crystals are turning into stars frozen still within the water.

Claire starts to choke on water around her when she comes to the self realization this is all a drug trip, nothing more than chemicals in her brain playing tricks on her.

Claire snaps out of her meditative state to find herself face down in sensory deprivation tank. She quickly gets up, reaching around the latch to open the door.

The tanks' door opens and slams on the outside of the tank, scattering a loud metallic sound throughout the basement that would have woke the dead.

In Claire's eyes all she can see is harsh white light, everything sounds very echo filled and she isn't sure where everyone is.

In a panic she quickly removed herself from the tank, dripping wet and cold, and screamed for help from Xavier who was nowhere to be found.

In the middle of her screaming her foot slipped on the cold tiled floor that is now covered in puddles of water, and Claire bashed the side of her head off the metal table in the middle of the room and was knocked out.

Chapter 13

Claire slowly opened her heavy eyes to find herself in the back of truck, and the sensation that her whole body was shaking. The truck was moving quickly down a road and Claire had no idea how she got in the vehicle at all. Her eyes spun around to see Xavier shooting a gun out of one of the side windows at whatever was chasing the truck behind them. Matthew was driving through the rough roads filled with bodies, cars, of course snow. Swerving and throwing Claire's' body around in the back of the truck.

Claire was about to lay back down to stop her mind from spinning when her eyes caught a glimpse of the clouds and their colour. The yearly acid snow storm would be in full effect soon because the sky was a darker shade of green than usual and the snowflakes begun to look like small pieces of grey ash.

Acidic snow takes longer to melt because of the chemical properties in the snows molecules, and is very dangerous if it comes in contact with human flesh.

"Claire you're awake!" said Matthew

"Yeah I guess I am, what the fuck happened, how did I get in this truck?" Claire asked.

"You fell out of the sensory deprivation tank and smacked your head on the table, we found you lying on the floor. It was hard to tell how long you were laying there because the salt level in the water kept it from freezing on your body." Xavier said.

Claire reached up and felt her head was wrapped in some sort of bandage and when she brought her hand down to look at it, there was blood on her fingertips.

"Fuck that must have been some fall I took, I don't remember anything after I woke up." Claire said.

"Well Eric came back to the house with a small army of junkies. They had these custom ComRig backpacks with VR helmet attachments. Eric was controlling them from a small ComRig inside his backpack. Their eyes Claire, you could see them glowing behind the VR helmets." Xavier said.

"Jesus, what's the point of having the portable ComRigs?" Claire asked.

"That's so that he can make them think that we have Bright Blue for them, so they come attack us. I was able to hack wirelessly into his feed, and we would appear to be creatures whose blood was Bright Blue. In their eyes because of the VR helmets, they would have ripped our bodies apart just to get it." Xavier replied.

"That's what's behind us right now?" Claire asked.

"Yes it is." Xavier said awkwardly between gunshots.

"Did you manage to make contact with the EBEs while you were inside the tank Claire?" Matthew asked

"Yeah, I think so. Are they the super tall purple people that never speak? Live in what I think is some underwater world with crystals and shit?" Claire asked.

"Sounds like you had quite the trip, and yes that's them, what did they say?!" Xavier asked.

"I have no idea, they never spoke they just showed me a bunch of plant visuals and crystals and I don't know man, it was all super weird. I have no idea what it's all supposed to mean." Claire replied.

"I want you to think about what they showed you, and really explore the possible deeper meaning behind the visuals. If this isn't going to work there is no point in even going to my hanger to go up and deploy the device we've made. We need their help now or never, Eric and his junkie army are going to be right there with us and we need to make sure." Xavier demanded.

"Xavier, I'm sorry, all I remember is a small plant and some lights, and crystals." Claire said nervously.

"Matthew, turn left here!" Xavier shouted while his gun shot a bullet straight through the eye socket of a junkie hanging out of the side of vehicle behind them.

Claire closed her eyes as her face scrunched up trying to avoid having to see people die.

"Where am I going now?" said Matthew as he was quickly approaching a large fork in the road with no signs.

"RIGHT!" said Xavier.

Matthew turned right on the street, and within minutes of driving down the street, through the acidic snow wall he saw it, the airplane hangar.

"Pull right up to the side door we're going to go in there." Xavier said.

"Right on." Matthew said as he pulled up beside a large metal door with a key card scanner with a blinking red light.

Claire grabbed the device from the back of the truck and tucked it under her mother's jacket protecting it from the elements. The team piled out of the truck as quickly as they could and went over to the large metal door. Xavier scanned the palm of his hand and the door hissed loudly and opened. The team quickly rushed inside and slammed the door behind them just as Eric's little team of junkies got to it. Through the small window on the door Claire could see the glowing eyes of the Bright Blue hungry junkies.

It scared her knowing that the only thing stopping them from ripping her internal organs out was a rectangular piece of metal. Their yellow broken teeth and slimy purple tongues were grinding on the window, as the acid snow fell on their flesh burning small holes into their bodies. They didn't care; all they cared about was getting their next fix. She felt bad for them, mostly because of her mother. Claire wasn't sure if the

EBEs were going to help them with their plan at all, but she knew she had to try something.

"Xavier is the plane ready yet?" Claire asked as she placed the device inside a small Faraday cage in case of lightning storms, near the back of the solid black plane and put her mother's coat back on her now shivering body.

"Yeah come on get in here we have to go now."

Matthew and Xavier sat in the driver seats and Claire stayed towards the back of the plane with the device. Xavier pressed a small button which opened the hangar doors, as soon as they opened, five junkies came running inside the hangar, and because of their helmets they couldn't see that they were running straight towards the propeller on the front of the plane.

Their blood sprayed across the front window of the plane and Xavier took off with full force soaring upwards towards the toxic cloud formation.

"Hold onto to something!" Xavier said as he pulled down hard on the control handle and the view outside of the planes window became a level of darkness unknown to the human eye.

Chapter 14

Eric and the two junkies he had left alive watch in anger as the plane flew out of the hanger and launched into the sky disappearing behind a thick black ink filled cloud. Beside the hangar was a field of old electrical towers. When Eric saw them, he immediately came up with a plan. He did up his mustard yellow coat and secured his SunAir ventilation mask and made a run for it, towards the towers.

Back inside the plane things were getting a little out of control and the plan was looking like a complete failure. The plane was eroding from the toxicity levels in the clouds and acid rain now coating the outside of the plane, they were currently engulfed inside of a acid storm. The air was almost not breathable, and the engine was starting to give out as they reached a certain altitude due to the thickness of the air in that atmospheric level.

Claire wasn't sure she'd make it out of this alive, and closed her eyes and started to think of her mother holding her in her arms. The thought was soon destroyed when a hole ripped open on the side of the airplane blowing Claire's white hair in

every direction and forcing the plane to jerk violently and start spinning.

Eric, completely exhausted, had now reached the top of one of the electrical towers, surrounded by a field of snow and the rest of the world hidden behind the wall of acidic ash.

He locked his legs into the metal frame to ensure he wouldn't fall and took his backpack off his back and pulled out his EMP device. After pressing a few buttons, a large blue light lit up on the face of the device and he pressed it.

A large electromagnetic pulse shot out from the device instantly destroying the ComRigs on the backs on his junkie minions leaving them standing in the middle of nowhere in the cold to die, completely clueless as to how they got there.

The blast shot up through the clouds, towards the plane. Xavier had heard the sound before in his lab, when there was a technological failure, and he knew what was about to happen.

"Claire, Matthew, it's been an honor working with you, and please for the love of god let this work. Goodbye and thank you for everything you've done for me, and this planet." Xavier said

as he heard the approaching EMP blast from below, he swung the plane's side door open and jumped out.

"No!" Claire yelled at the top of her lungs, but the sound of wind shooting in through the side door muffled her screams.

Xavier knew he was going to die when the EMP reached the plane and his fully robotic body, his final thoughts were that of a happy healthy earth as his robotic body fell towards earth at bullet like speeds.

He slammed into the EMP wall shutting down all of his inner workings. His lifeless metallic body was quickly approaching the ground, his digital green eyes slowly dimmed to a solid black colour as he slammed into the electrical tower that Eric was hanging onto.

Eric's legs, which were still strapped into the tower, were ripped off when Xavier's heavy body hit him and carried the rest of his body down the ground, crushing him under his metallic body weight.

Eric's mouth filled with acidic snow as he tried to scream out for help, but before a single breath could leave his mouth

the snow melted and poured down his throat eroding his vocal chords and slowly decapitating him completely.

The EMP blast had now reached the airplane while Matthew is trying to maintain it's ascending to the upper mesosphere to deploy the device.

"Claire is the device okay?!" Matthew yelled towards the back of the plane.

Claire was in the middle of shutting the planes door with her only currently useful arm and yelled back

"I'm not sure I'll have to look at it!"

She moved towards the back of the plane and opened the Faraday cage that the device was in, and clicked the device on.

"It still works! The cage must have shielded it from the EMP blast!" Claire shouted.

"Fuck yeah!" Matthew exclaimed.

Suddenly the entire plane lost all power and appeared to be floating in mid air.

"Claire what the fuck is going on?"

"I have no idea, are we falling or staying still?" Claire asked.

Matthew leaned forward in his chair as far the straps would allow him to move and looked around outside of the window trying to see anything through the blackness.

Suddenly there is a loud overpowering metallic screeching noise and the entire roof of the plane is ripped open like a can of tuna. Matthew quickly disconnects himself from the chair he's in and rushes to the back of the plane to be near Claire.

"Claire what the fuck is that?"

"I think it's them."

"What do you mean them? The EBE's you contacted?"

"Yeah, I think they've come to help us."

Above Claire and Matthew's heads, appeared what looked like a large ship, shaped like a purple flower made out of some sort of slime covered organic material. The center of the flower had a ring of purple and white lights. A series of long robotic tentacle looking limbs were protruding out from the side of the

ship and were grabbing Xavier's plane. One of the limbs made its way into the planes cabin and a bright light scanned Matthew.

The light changed to the colour green and moved onto Claire. The same light scanned Claire, only this time the light turned red and a loud electronic pulsating sound shot through the skies. Claire heard a soft voice inside of her head, that wasn't in English, but she still understood it somehow.

"They won't take someone on their ship that isn't one hundred percent organic human. They see AI and other forms of robotics as a step down on the evolutionary scale from human." Claire said after listening to the voice in her mind.

"So it's looking like it me going up there eh kiddo."

"No, I'm taking it off!"

Claire began to try and rip her robotic limb off her body as Matthew grabbed for the device and began to be lifted into the EBEs flower shaped ship.

"No just wait a second it's almost off!"

Matthew was too far away from the plane now for Claire's voice to reach him. The EBEs let go of the plane and it began to tumble towards Earth's surface. Angry and frustrated Claire

took out a knife from her bag on the plane and began to hack away at her tissue surrounding the robotic limb as the plane fell towards the ground below.

As Claire looks up from the blood bath to gaze out of the front window, her arm falls to the front of the plane with a thud, echoing an anemic vertigo spell through Claire's mind as it smashes on the glass, creating a crack. She could see the ground approaching, closer and closer, when she is ripped out of the plane and upwards into the clouds via one of the EBEs ships tentacles.

The plane crashed to the ground and Claire's arm was thrown into a nearby field. The device being controlled by Matthew is set off.

The sky begins to open up above Claire and shine light for the first time on Earth's ground in over fifty years. The noctilucent clouds begin to break up in the mesosphere and within minutes the snow begins to melt on the Earth's surface.

Matthew's body begins to fall from the sky, his eye sockets are empty and bleeding, and his skin is a pale green colour. The

EBE's wouldn't let that device inside of their ship, so he had to stay outside in the toxic clouds and deploy it himself.

The EBE's ship was living organic tissue, it was a creature itself, when it entered down lower to grab Claire before the plane crashed, and it suffered extremely toxic radiation levels in its body, and began to die.

Matthews' body hit the ground and exploded into a million pieces coating a part of the runway by the airport hangar. The ship began to make a crash landing through the clouds towards earth. The outside of the ship began to turn a dark green colour as the organic tissue of the ship began to melt like the snow covered field it was headed for.

As the ship slammed into the ground it cracked open like a human skull being hit with a hatchet. The dark blue blood of the ship poured into the field like waves poured over rocks at lake shores in the old days.

There was no stopping it, there was no explosion, and everything was covered in blue blood. The ship and all EBE's attached to its inner workings were now dead.

The warm sunshine now starting to break through the blackness in the sky was warming the toxic snow creating water in small pools around the runway and crashed ship. Claire's robotic arm still had the small mechanism in that attaches the biological to the mechanical that she got from building eight zero eight, it had ripped away from her flesh when she cut the arm off.

As the sun began to melt the snow it created a puddle around Claire's arm, which sparked when some of the EBE's ships blood poured into the puddle.

Slowly inside the puddle, but at speeds not known to mankind, a small purple organism began to form inside the puddle.

The purple blood was boiling and the robotic arms fingers' began to twitch and extend. Within minutes a small, slime covered, organic entity was lying in the field. Its skin looked like a sponge covered in slime, its four large black eyes began to open and blink at different intervals and it's tentacle like limbs began to move in the puddle it was seated in.

Seated in the middle of the field, snow melting all around, the sunshine warming the planet, the purple creature let out a

loud liquid filled scream for no one, as it continued to grow. Behind the creature laid the EBE's ship.

Through one of the many cracks in the tissue on the outside of the ship Claire's little hand grabbed through and pulled herself up and out of the wreckage.

Shocked, but fully aware of what just happened, Claire looked across the field to see the purple creature moving in random directions, unsure of what it was or where it was while it screamed. Attached to it was her robotic arm.

"Hey!" Claire yelled as loud as she could at the creature.

The creature turned its body and tilted the upper part of its body, blinking its large black eyes while staring at Claire. The robotic limb moved in front of the creature and it formed a fist while it was staring at Claire.

Claire's teeth grinded together, her nostrils flaring, mind completely consumed by anger, she stands up straight, trench coat torn to shreds, white hair coated in human and alien blood, and started to walk over to the creature, her only remaining fist clenched.

"That's mine!"

THE END