

GENE. SYS.

By

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The world is supposed to end in about a year. My dad says that things are going to be very different. He won't tell me why but he said that it's the reason I was created. I've been thinking about that a lot lately. At least since I found the ladder that opens to the roof. It's tucked away in the back corner of the library and I came across it when I walked in searching for books on creation and the end of the world.

I liked the library because it contained real books. I could look up everything I wanted on tablets, but the way the plastic felt on my fingers as I turned the pages made me feel like I was a part of the story being told. I also liked that it was always empty. Nobody ever came in here so I would often come to escape and read. My dad said that it was more of a museum than a library, but I liked it either way.

The electronic catalog at the front of the library told me to search in the philosophy section in the back of the library. I read everything I could. Everything seemed to have a different answer. Most of the books weren't much help and the books marked religious texts were so broad that they only gave me more questions.

I had gone searching for a different corner to perch up against when I saw the ladder. I climbed up and opened the door that was at the top and stepped out onto the roof. I looked around and saw the entire compound. I saw the walls surrounding the compound and I saw the hundreds of drone guards patrolling the walls. They all looked the exact same; carbon copies of one another.

The sky looked different from atop the roof. It seemed bigger. That was the first time I saw beyond the walls. I couldn't see much because the walls are about thirty feet tall but when I turned to the west I saw it. A triangular rock formation jutting out from beyond the wall. I must have stared at it for three hours before I realized that I was shivering. All I could think about was how much I wanted to go beyond the walls and see what else was out there.

Dad told me that it was very dangerous beyond the walls of the compound and that I was not allowed to go out there no matter what. He did tell me though that what I saw beyond the wall was the Great Pyramid of Giza. So naturally I read. I would bring the books up here and in two nights I had read everything there was about the pyramids and the ancient Egyptian culture. I imagined I was one of the pharaohs. I believe that I have the same olive complexion and light eyes that they had. I'm definitely taller. I'm the tallest person at this

compound, so I can't really believe there are many people that are closer to the stars than I. I wanted so badly to be one of them. Their life seemed free and therefore this pyramid became a symbol of freedom and it only made me hungrier to see this 5000-year-old wonder.

I did some quick geometry and figured that the pyramid was only about a mile away. I could run there in about three minutes. I had it all figured out but then I started to think about what else might be out there. What else are those walls hiding from me? Will the end of the world affect them?

For eight straight days those were the questions on my mind, but not tonight. Different thoughts are occupying my mind. Tomorrow I am supposed to meet Ev for the first time. We were created at the same time but the only time I remember catching a glimpse of her was two months ago when I was released from my incubation tube. They were carting me away when I rolled my head over and saw her floating in her tube. They released her the next day.

Dad and the other scientists did everything they could to keep us separate. We were trained and schooled separately. They ran tests on us separately and they always had drone guards making sure we never crossed paths. I would always try to steal a look or sneak around to see her, but they were very careful.

Now, I wouldn't mind if they pushed the meeting back a couple of days. I'm nervous and scared. I wonder what she knows about me. Is she nervous and scared too? Is she having trouble sleeping right now? I wonder if dad told her about the end of the world as well?

These thoughts dominate my mind as I lie down on my blanket and stare at the stars. I close my eyes and before I know it the darkness of sleep has overtaken me.

I wake up shivering. I don't really know how long I've been asleep but the sky has become lighter, so I know that daybreak is coming soon. I climb down the ladder to the library and walk out into the hallway. A few drones walk past me. Their cold black eyes glance at me and quickly look away, but not before I feel the loathing they send my way.

I duck into my room and without turning on the lights I crawl into my bed. I barely have time for my nightly ritual of barricading myself with pillows before I fall back to sleep.

I dream of standing alone in a vast white abyss. It's cold and the ground feels hard and slick like ice. The sky is also white and the only reason I can tell that there is a difference between the ground and sky is because I see a figure out in the distance. I run towards the figure and as I get closer I can tell that it's a girl. Her long blonde hair reaches down to the

small of her back. She is thin and fairly tall. Her back is to me so I reach out to touch her. Right before I do I call out “Ev”, but she doesn’t turn. She vanishes and reappears in the distance. I walk back up to her and the same thing happens. The cycle repeats itself until I’m woken up.

The knock at the door shocks me awake. I sit up as the door opens and the silhouette shades me from the bright light wanting to enter the room. The silhouette’s hand reaches to the side and flicks on the light. The brightness burns my eyes and I retreat under my blanket. “Turn it off!”

“Time to train.” Says the deep voice. I know without looking that it’s Grant, my weapons and combat instructor. I like working with him. He pushes me really hard and he is the only one that seems to be able to keep up with me when I run. I look out from under the covers and his dark skin and jump suit make him appear as though he is still a silhouette. “Dungeon, ten minutes!” He tosses me a protein pouch and walks out. Grant is never one to be anything less than direct.

I sit up and tear open the protein pouch. I’ve never liked the way the goo feels as it travels down my throat but at least I got a good flavor today. It tastes like a mix between orange and mango with a hint of vanilla.

I look around my room. It's small with no windows. The bathroom is to the right of my bed and the closet is to my left. I have a nightstand on each side of the bed, but both are stacked with books. Most of them on ancient Egypt.

I stand up from my bed and instantly feel dizzy as a pain shoots to the front of my forehead. I know it has to do with falling asleep on the roof. I walk to the bathroom and splash my face with water. I'm hoping the protein pouch will help alleviate the headache; otherwise it will be a brutal training session. I slip into my green jump suit from my closet and head out the door back to the hallway.

Something feels weird about my walk to the dungeon. It's located under the library so I have made this walk many times before. Today seems different though. It's not until I'm in the elevator heading down that I realize what it was. I didn't see a single drone in the hallway. There are almost always three or four keeping an eye on me. I can't recall a day when I didn't see at least one.

The elevators open on the ground floor and the second I step out I am hit in the head with a fifteen-pound leather ball. I fall effortlessly to the ground. Whatever hope I had of losing the headache is now gone. "Get up!" I hear Grant yell from across the room. I know that I am supposed to be prepared from the second I step off the elevator, but the

disappearance of the drones had me preoccupied and I lost track of where I was. Grant has trained me to always be prepared and ready, but today I lost focus for a brief second and because of that, the left side of my face burns and my head hurts more than it did ten minutes ago.

I look up to see another ball flying towards my body and I quickly roll out of the way and pop up to my feet. I assess my surroundings and see that Grant is hiding behind a giant rock formation. The entire room is a red rock desert landscape with boulders and a few dead trees scattered about. The heat of the sun blaring from the sky causes beads of sweat to form on my brow. I look down at the ball that hit my face and see that it is actually a boulder. I pick it up and hurl it at Grant, forcing him to duck further behind the rock formation. I use the opportunity of being out of his view to pick up the other small boulder and run up a different rock formation.

I quickly analyze the options he has. He can look out from either side of his rock formation, he can climb up his rock formation or he can run for cover at one of the two other rock formations. Looking out wont do him any good and climbing his formation will leave him vulnerable since I am already at the high vantage point and can hit him with the bolder before he can find his balance at the top. The only option he has is to run.

“You were late.” He says. I know he is trying to pinpoint my location so I stay quiet. My eyes stay fixed on the area between the rock formations where I believe he will run to. I see his head poke out briefly in my peripherals. A split second later he is running from his cover. I hurl my boulder at the area in front of him. He stops to let the boulder land in front of him. “You missed!”

In the moments he took his eyes off me to watch the boulder land, I bounded off my perch and charged at him. He turns just as I lower my shoulder into his torso and drive him into one of the dead trees. I ram my forearm into his neck, holding him in place with my arm. “No I didn’t.” I say as I look into his eyes and watch them bulge as he struggles for air. His eyes shut and I count, “One, two, three.” I let go and step back as he falls to his knees and struggles for air. I know I shouldn’t take pleasure in this, but it has only been recently that I have been able to beat him. I have endured countless beatings at his hands, so it feels good to be able to repay the favor.

I stick my hand out to help him to his feet. As he struggles to regain his senses I can see his true age. He is rapidly approaching 40. Still, at nearly twice my age, he is a worthy opponent. “I’m proud of you.” He says as he places his hand on my shoulder. “You used both physical and mental abilities to beat me.

It's important to remember that. A good plan will always take precedent over brut force."

"Can we get out of the simulation?" I ask. Grant always preaches using both physical and mental. I don't mean to cut him off, but my mind has returned to the oddity of the drones not being around. He snaps me back into the moment when he answers my question with one of his own. "Would you like to do the honors?" I know that it's a very simple thing but I have wanted to do it since the simulation training began. I take a deep breath and say "Aperio." I look around to see the desert landscape disappear around me. The dead trees turn into padded support beams. The rock formations turn into big stacks of mats and pads.

I pick up the weighted ball closest to me and walk it over to the rack holding other weighted balls. "What's on your mind, kid?" Grant inquires. I guess it's pretty obvious that I have something on my mind.

"I didn't see any drones on my way down here." I answer as I sit on a stack of mats.

"No you wouldn't have." He says as he sits next to me. "You and Ev are meeting today so there is no need for them to keep you from each other."

"Why was it so important that we didn't meet before now?" This question has always bothered me.

Grant leans back against the wall. "Dr. Anfang has his reasons. I know that he didn't want either of

you getting in the way of each other's development. It's very important that you both have matured to a certain level before being exposed to each other."

I have so many questions, but all that comes out of my mouth is, "Oh". I'm not sure I will ever get the answer I'm looking for. That might be because I'm not sure what answer I want to hear. I stand and walk towards the elevator door. Grant follows me. He stops me just before the elevator. "Kid. You are very good at following your instincts. Always trust them. Just keep in mind; emotions are the fog that cloud your instincts."

I push the button and the elevator doors open. I walk in. As the doors close I hear Grant add, "Make sure you shower before you meet her. She's going to love you, but not if you smell." His laughter fades as I rise to the main floor. The doors open and I step out. The halls are empty once again. I don't like it. I can hear every step I take. I try to silence my feet as I walk. It's not working. I look around and the hallway seems to be closing in on me. My heart starts racing and a lump rises into my throat. I struggle to breathe and know I just have to get to my room, so I run. I speed down the hall and when I get to my bedroom I fly in and slam the door behind me. I fall onto my bed and shut my eyes.

For the first time in the two months I've been alive I feel true and genuine fear. I've been scared

before, but all those times there was something tangible that I was able to attach my fear to. Right now there is nothing. Just fear. Meeting Ev is going to change everything. I'm not sure how, but I know it will. Resentment begins to accompany the fear. I don't want to, but right now I hate her. As strong as those feelings are, it's not fair to her that I feel this way because I haven't met her yet. I pick myself up and walk into the bathroom. Hopefully a shower will calm me down. The way the hot water hits my back and neck always seems to get me relaxed.

The shower must have put me in a trance because I jump when I hear a pounding on the bathroom door. I can tell through the fogged glass that there are two drones standing in my bedroom. They are here to take me to Ev. I'm not sure how long I've been in the shower but the wrinkles on my fingers tell me it's been a while. I shut the water off and towel myself dry.

"You need to get dressed quickly." I hear one of the drones say. "Dr. Anfang is waiting."

They move to the doorway of my bedroom as I dress. I don't say a word to them. It's not worth it. Their speech is always short and sounds well rehearsed. You can never tell them apart anyway because they all look the exact same; black hair, black eyes and olive skin. If I spoke with one, I would not know which one it was the next day.

I look down at my bed and see a pair of pants and a button up shirt. Only the scientists wear these. I have only ever worn jump suits. Any nerves that I had lost in the shower are now back.

The clothes feel very uncomfortable and restricting. They are making me feel hot and causing my palms to sweat. I wipe them on the pants as we walk out of the room and down the hallway. The drones walk on either side of me. The sound of our footsteps gets to me so I break the silence. “What are your names?”

“137”, says the one on my left. “80”, says the other one.

“I’m Atom”, I reply.

“We know”, they respond in unison.

I struggle for conversation. “What do you guys like to do for fun?”

80 looks at me as we walk. A smile graces his face for a brief second. “We like to play Breekbal.”

“We keep that to ourselves, 80.” 137 scolds 80.

My curiosity has definitely gotten the better of me, “What’s Breekbal?”

80 smiles again, “Calm down, 137. He doesn’t even know what it is.” They obviously don’t intend on sharing either. I try my best to imagine what that would be. It must be some sort of game. For a few more moments my mind remains preoccupied with

Breekbal, then we turn the corner and I see my dad standing at the end of the hallway.

“Thank you fellas,” he smiles through his big white beard. “You are dismissed.”

“Thank you Dr. Anfang,” the drones say in unison as they turn and walk away. I feel naked again standing alone at the end of the hallway. Dad starts walking towards me. His round body fills the hallway slightly more than most of the other scientists here. He has definitely been looking forward to this day and that makes me even more nervous.

He reaches out and places his hand on my shoulder. “You have no reason to be nervous, Atom.”

Without realizing it, he’s guiding me towards the door. “What do I say?”

We stop just outside the door. My hands get sweaty again. She is on the other side of that door. Dad squares me up to him, “You don’t have to worry about that. Conversation will come. Just be yourself.” He pulls me in and embraces me.

“What if she doesn’t like me?” I mumble into his shoulder.

“Well then we failed as scientists.” He smiles. “She’s going to like you Atom and you are going to like her. Now get in there before I have to drag you in.”

He opens the door and walks in. I follow right behind. I poke my head from behind him and I see Ev

leaning against the wall farthest from the door. She's taller than I imagined. Her dark brown hair falls to either side of her face, ending just at her shoulders. Her pale skin makes her look porcelain and fragile. I want nothing more than to protect her. My heart races.

Dad walks to the center of the room. I stay planted by the door. The ability to run away if I have to brings me comfort. Dad reaches out to her, "Ev?"

She looks up and I see her eyes for the first time. They are green like mine but hers seem to transcend all logic. They don't look at me, they look in me. I want nothing more than to be with her but my nerves cause me to look away. She looks away as well.

Dad walks back over towards me, "Maybe I'll just leave you two alone." He nudges me towards the center of the room as he walks out and shuts the door. "What?" is all that comes out of my mouth before I stop myself in the middle of the room. I feel exposed without the comfort of a wall behind me.

I look everywhere but at her. I'm so nervous that I haven't noticed anything else in the room. There is a couch and two chairs to one side. On the other side is a table with water and protein pouches. I can feel her watching me. It's too quiet and I suddenly don't know what to do with my hands. I decide to break the silence, "What's your favorite flavor?" I walk towards the table and see movement out of the corner

of my eye. I turn to look at her and before I have time to react she has me in her arms.

I don't know what to do. I just stand there. Her hair feels soft against my skin and it smells like a mix of sour apples and vanilla. I want nothing more than to pull her closer in but my arms won't move. She must sense that I am uncomfortable because she pulls away.

She falls back into the couch. "I'm so sorry."

"Don't be." I reply as I sit in one of the chairs across from the couch. "You just surprised me."

She manages to show a little smile. "I feel like such an idiot. It's just that...I...Well, I've been looking forward to this day for a long time. I knew you existed but they never let me see you. I was just so excited and then nervous."

Her confession puts me at ease. "You just described everything I've been thinking. That's why I asked you about the protein pouch. I was so nervous, I didn't know what else to talk about."

She leans back in the couch. "Strawberry Lemonade." She laughs. It's intoxicating; I can't help but join in. The air around us doesn't feel heavy anymore. "What's yours?" She asks.

"Anything with vanilla." I respond. So many questions rush into my head but before I manage to ask any of them my dad comes back in. As much as I

didn't want him to leave me alone in here with Ev, now I want nothing more than for him to be gone.

He smiles. "Looks like you two have hit it off."

"Not yet, Rene! You haven't really given us much of a chance." Ev sasses back. She calls him Rene? That's my dad's first name, but I would never call him that. In fact, I would never speak to him the way she just did. This actually reveals more about him to me than it does of her. The side of him that I know would never let me talk back to him. He obviously treats us differently. For the first time I feel that he is hiding things from me.

"You'll have plenty of time to get to know each other. From now on you will be training together and taking classes together." He looks at both of us.

"Your first class starts now."

We both stand and walk towards him. He puts his hand on my shoulder and it feels like a foreign object. He's still my dad but I only know a fraction of who he is. I know now that I can no longer be satisfied with the answers he gives me. I need to seek things out on my own. I need to know what he and all the scientists are actually doing. I need to find out why we are confined to this compound. Most importantly, I need to learn what my true purpose is. Why I was created.

We walk down the hallway to the end with the classrooms. Dad seems overly happy. I guess he's

been looking forward to this day longer than we have. Probably since before he created us. “You two are getting a new teacher today. Brianna Lawson. She’s a handful, but you will like her.”

“What’s the class?” I ask.

“It’s a very important class.” He responds. “Recent human history. It’s everything that has happened in the last 600 years.”

Ev folds her arms. “It sounds boring.” Her coarse approach to my dad causes me to laugh. She certainly carries some resentment towards him.

He doesn’t seem amused. “I promise you it’s not boring. It starts with the first world war.”

“That does sound fun.” Ev smiles.

My interest is also peaked. “How many world wars have there been?”

“Four.” My dad says as he stops just outside a door. “But you will learn more about them from Brianna.”

Ev walks in and I follow. “Thanks dad.” I say out of habit. He closes the door behind us. The room has windows on one wall and the other walls are empty. Like every other classroom, this one has around a dozen giant beanbags arranged in a circle on the floor. I choose the green one like usual. Ev sits in the beanbag next to mine.

“He let’s you call him dad?” She asks as she makes herself comfortable in her beanbag.

I can tell this is a sensitive subject for her. “That’s what he told me to call him. He would never let me call him Rene.”

“I knew he preferred you.” She’s obviously hurt. “All he does is talk about you and he corrects me if I ever call him dad or father or anything.”

I don’t really know how to respond, but I try. “I think it’s because he respects you. He sees you more as an equal. All he does is coddle me. I just thought that’s how he was.”

Ev laughs. “Not at all.” I really like when she laughs it makes me feel better.

We both stand when the doors open and Brianna Lawson walks in. She is much younger than I would have imagined. She couldn’t be older than 26 or 27. Her deep red hair is pulled back into a ponytail and the big glasses she wears cover half her face. I can tell though that underneath those glasses she has a very refined quality about her. She carries herself well, which might be because of her age. People have probably never taken her seriously since she is young and pretty.

I must have been in a trance staring at her because I get bumped in the shoulder by Ev and realize that Brianna has her hand extended towards me. “It’s nice to meet you Atom.” She says.

I shake her hand. “The pleasure is mine Ms. Lawson. I like your glasses.”

“Thank you. Please, call me Brianna.” She pulls her hand away and takes a seat on one of the beanbags. I can feel that my cheeks have turned red because of the heat emanating from them. Ev must have noticed them too because her eyes are burrowing holes into me. I feel ashamed, so I avoid making eye contact and sit back down in my beanbag. When Ev sits, she shuffles her beanbag closer to mine. My heart races as she does so. If she feels threatened by Brianna, she shouldn’t.

Brianna places a 3D hologram projector on the floor inside the beanbag circle. “I want you two to recall your world geography.” She hits a button on the projector and a giant image of the Earth projects before us. It looks odd. The ice shelves at the North and South poles are much smaller. She continues, “This hologram of Earth I’m sure looks different than what you are used to. That’s because this is an image of what the world looked like over 600 years ago in 1914.”

“It’s so different.” Ev mumbles. I look at her and can tell that she is just as enthralled as I am. Dad was right. This will be interesting.

“I want you two to just sit back, watch and listen. This information will be important for your survival.” Brianna taps the wall behind her and the windows darken, leaving the hologram to light the room.

What does she mean our survival? What are we going to have to survive? These questions flood my mind, but just as quickly as they came, I have to brush them aside. Brianna has started her lesson.

World War I marked the beginning of globalization. Prior to 1914, conflicts remained localized to their specific areas without much outside influence. When America joined the war in 1917 the world got a lot smaller. Any issues that would arise would now become worldwide issues. With radio and later television, these issues also became the concern of any citizen with access. This war ended the German Empire, but gave rise to two new ones. The Soviet Empire and the American Empire. This also brought us into the SciTech Age.

The Soviets, America and Germany all poured money into scientific research. This would lead Germany into attempting to reclaim their empire and their quest for power ignited World War II. In 1939 Europe was once again at war and in 1941 Japan brought America into the war. Though the war itself was mostly over control of certain land, World War II proved significant because it introduced the world to nuclear technology and nuclear weapons. The strong-arm gesture by America to drop two nuclear

bombs on Japan would actually raise tensions between them and the Soviet Empire. Both would try hard to win the Space Race and the Nuclear Race.

The Space Race did eventually put a man on the moon and would lead to the development of the Internet. This would be the final step to complete globalization because information could be accessed by anyone at any time. Secrets, whether national or personal would become obsolete.

The Nuclear Race would have different consequences. Though the Soviet Empire would fall apart due to internal conflict. The amount of nuclear weapons developed by those two countries would exceed 70,000 by 1990. Relations between nations from that point on would always carry the threat of a nuclear attack. By 2040, 18 nations would have nuclear weapons.

Around that time robotics had become commonplace and was used in everything from household chores to space travel. The Earth entered into one of its most peaceful eras, as the world powers would unite on the joint goal of putting a colony on Mars. Together the Americans, Chinese, Russians and the European Federation formed the NCM and built a base with launching platform on the moon. Over the following decades they went from putting a man on the moon to developing the first self-sustaining and renewable colony on Mars.

Though the first world countries had all switched to renewable energy, the rest of the world still depended heavily on fossil fuels. With reserves already low, the colonization of Mars drained what was left of the fuels and left the rest of the world in a perennial dark age. Conflicts arose between the third world countries, as they would fight to attain each other's resources. Brazil invaded Venezuela and took control of their oil, becoming a superpower in South America. Battles raged on in Africa, as famine became its biggest killer. The worst of the conflicts would happen between Pakistan and India in 2082, as Pakistan invaded India and India retaliated with nuclear force. This marked the beginning of World War III. Afghanistan and Iran allied with Pakistan and launched their nuclear missiles at India.

This forced the hand of the NCM countries. They sent troops into the region to stop the conflict and disarm all active nuclear weapons. Over all, the blasts and the ensuing fall out killed nearly 50 million people. When the conflict was resolved the NCM and other participating countries with nuclear weapons would sign the Fallout Treaty, agreeing to disarm all active weapons. Any country that did not participate in the treaty would be invaded and forced to disarm its weapons. The two lone holdouts, North Korea and Israel, showed little resistance to the NCM armies that forced their way into the countries. The

disarming of the last nuclear missile in 2148 would mark the end of the World War.

With the Earth in relative peace, the NCM countries would turn their attention back to the advancement of science and technology. They worked to develop chemicals that would offset the affects of the nuclear fallout and allow the areas to be habitable again. They developed cheaper versions of renewable energy that would allow the poorer countries to begin to flourish. Lastly they worked to make Africa a self-sustaining echo system by creating a web of pipes that would bring water from this compound on the Nile to the rest of the continent. With access to fresh water, farms could be more easily cultivated, causing the risk of famine and disease to decrease.

Humanity was once again flourishing but in their research they found that global temperatures had been steadily dropping. By the beginning of the 23rd century the Earth had entered its next ice age. The average temperature had dropped nearly 20 degrees Fahrenheit and would affect the cultivation of food. Africa however would flourish, as the climate change brought more rain. Other parts of the world would not fare as well. Famine and disease ravaged South America, Australia and Southeast Asia.

As the ice shelf pushed its way south, the northern countries became uninhabitable. Canadians

were welcomed into America. Europeans made their way towards the countries surrounding the Mediterranean. The Russians attempted to move down into China but were met with a heavy blockade, as the population was already too big and too hard to feed. Left with no other option the Russians attempted to force their way in, ending a long era of peace between the two countries. The other countries of the world did not concern themselves with the Russian/Chinese War because they all had to deal with their own regional conflicts. Since the food supply could not keep up with the demand of the people, countries closed down their trade routes, putting countries with poor access to resources at risk of famine and disease. Anarchy reigned supreme.

By 2304 the Earth had entered into World War IV. Countries fought other countries, civil wars raged in half the world, and neighbors would fight each other for access to resources. Amidst the chaos, those with money immigrated to Africa where the climate was ideal, the resources were plenty and the population was minimal. Africa became a cesspool of the world's privileged, including politicians and scientists. Together they decided that in order to save the human race from collapse, they needed to somehow end the ice age.

The decision was made to collect as many scientists as possible and assemble them at the compound by the Nile River. There, they were tasked with finding a way to reverse the ice age. One of the scientists, a young geneticist by the name of Rene Anfang was put in charge of creating clones to use as security for the compound. When progress was stalled on a way to end the ice age, Dr. Anfang and a few other scientists began a revolution to change the objective of the compound. The revolution was successful and the scientists embarked on their new goal. The reset that we are in the midst of today.

The history lesson was six hours long and was a lot to process. It left me with so many questions but I wanted nothing more than to nap. Ev and I went back to our separate rooms and rested. I must have really needed it because I fell right to sleep and though I woke up four hours later, it only felt like I was asleep for a few minutes.

I sat up from my bed and saw that it was just passed ten o'clock. Most everyone would be asleep by now. If there was any night that I needed to go up on the roof, tonight was it. I grabbed a couple of protein pouches and my blanket. Last night was pretty cold, so I'm sure tonight wont be any different.

I head out of my room and nearly make it to the library before I realize that I could have Ev join me. I turn back and head down the empty hallways. I'm still not used to seeing them empty. They feel haunting without the drones. I turn down her hallway and it occurs to me that I don't know which door is hers. I take a wild guess and choose the third of the six doors.

"Ev?" I knock. I wait a second before I move to the next door and try the same thing. This time I knock a little louder. I'm afraid that if it's not her room I'll be disturbing the actual tenant.

I walk to the next door and am about to knock when I hear my name being called from behind me. I turn to see Ev poking her head out from the first door. Why didn't I try that one first? I walk towards her. "Hey."

"What are you doing?" She asks.

I point to the other doors. "Did I..."

"They are all empty." She responds. "No one has ever been in any of them. They keep them locked."

"Weird. It's the same in my hallway." I lean against her doorframe. "I just thought that was where the drones stayed."

She leans against the other side of the doorframe. "The who?"

"The drones. Those clones that were always guarding the hallways." I say.

"I didn't realize that's what they were called." She smiles. "What are you doing here anyway?"

This time I smile. "I want to show you something."

"Are we allowed to leave our rooms?" She takes a step back into her room a bit skeptical.

"They never told us we couldn't. Come on. You'll enjoy it." I reach my hand out to her. This gesture must have made her feel more comfortable because she takes my hand and lets me lead her back down the hallways. After a few turns I realize that we are still holding hands and my heartbeat increases

and I can feel myself getting sweaty. I let go and offer her one of my protein pouches to not lead on that I got nervous again.

We get to the library and walk in. “I’ve been to the library before, Atom.” She stops just inside the door.

“Just come with me.” I’m frustrated by her hesitation. With how reckless it seemed like she was in talking to dad, she is way too cautious. Hopefully once she sees what I have to show her she will appreciate it. She follows me to the back of the library where the ladder is. I climb to the top and push myself to the roof. I look back down and see her standing on the ground looking around. “Climb up. No one is coming.”

I lay the blanket down on the ground and sit. After a few moments she sit next to me. “We shouldn’t be up here. We could get into a lot of trouble if anyone found out.”

“No one is going to find out. I’ve been coming up here for a while.” I respond a bit annoyed. “Just relax and take in the view.”

I can tell she is trying since she takes a deep breath and leans back on her arms. “What are we looking at?”

The sky is just as clear as it was last night. I point to the top of the pyramid on the other side of

the wall. “You see that over there? That’s the top of the Great Pyramid of Giza. It’s over 5000 years old.”

“Wow.” She is genuinely impressed. “What is it? Who built it?”

Her questions make me smile. I’m excited to share what I’ve learned. “There is actually more than one. That one is just the tallest. The Egyptians built them as a way to honor their dead kings or pharaohs. So they are pretty much giant tombs.”

“That’s amazing. How do you know all of that?” She leans forward to get a closer look.

I lean with her. “I just got books from the library and read all I could. I want to sneak past the wall and see it up close. Want to come with me?”

She turns to me. “Atom, you know we are not allowed to leave the compound. Rene has told me many times, as I’m sure he has told you. It’s very dangerous out there.”

“Has he ever told you what danger is on the other side of the walls?” I retort. Maybe a little bit too strong since she scoots back.

“Does it matter what it is? Why else would they have all those drones patrolling the walls? They are obviously there to keep something out.” She scolds me.

“Or to keep us in.” I say.

She stands. “I’m getting tired. I think I’m going to go back to my room.”

I don't object. "Sleep well," is all I give. This isn't how I pictured things happening up here. I'm not sure what I had in mind. I just knew that I wanted it to be relaxing.

"You too." She says with a crack in her voice. I don't look at her as she heads down the ladder. Instead I lay back and cover myself with the blanket. I stare at the moon thinking about the base that is up there and the fact that no one has been up there in almost 400 years. I wonder what it's like up there or on the colony on Mars. I fall asleep pretty easily.

That night I dream that I am being chased by thousands of drones. They chase me through the hallways and out into the grounds of the compound. There are no walls surrounding the compound so I can see the pyramid ahead of me. I run toward the pyramid but I see Ev standing off to the side of the pyramid. She is calling me towards her but I choose to run towards the pyramid to escape the drones pursuing me. I run into the opening of the pyramid and the drones stop just outside and gather around the entire pyramid.

I wake up when the warmth of the morning sun hits my face. I might have slept through the night but I know I will be sore today because the concrete roof offers no comfort. I eat one of my protein pouches and gather the blanket. I'm hoping I can get a little more time in my bed before training this morning.

I crawl into my bed and fall right to sleep. I'm not sure how long I got before I was woken up, but it didn't matter, my back is stiff. The pounding on the door matches the pounding in my head. I slowly stand to ensure I keep my balance and I walk to the door.

The door seems a bit heavier this morning and when I open it I'm surprised to see my dad and Ev instead of Grant. Ev seems to be avoiding any eye contact. She seems upset and I want to do nothing more than apologize but dad's presence makes it difficult. It's a private matter that doesn't concern him.

"Oh good, you're dressed." Dad says as he pulls me out into the hallway. I look down and realize I never changed out of my jump suit from yesterday.

Before I know it we are walking down the hallways. "Where is Grant?"

"You will both train later. Right now you are coming with me because I think it's about time I show you something." His pace picks up a little. He seems both excited and serious. He takes us through the last hallway to a door that has always been off limits. I have only seen scientists come through those doors. He puts his hand up to a screen by the door and leans into the screen "Rene Anfang." A light scans his hand and the door unlocks. He holds it open for Ev and I to walk through.

The halls in this part of the complex are red instead of the blue I am used to. I know that this is the area where the scientists sleep but that's about it.

Ev speaks up. "Where are we?"

"This is the research and development wing." Dad keeps walking and we follow. "This is where us scientists work and sleep. In that order." He chuckles to himself. I don't get it.

He leads us down a couple more hallways to an elevator. We get in and he puts his hand on another screen. "Rene Anfang." I can feel it taking us down. After a few moments, it stops and the doors open. What I see before me is so overwhelming that I can barely take it all in. There is a giant room filled with machinery and monitors. It seems like around thirty scientists are working on the various equipment. In the center there appears to be twelve giant tubes. Dad turns to Ev and I. "Welcome to the Center for Genetic and Obstetric Design, or the Center for G.O.D. This Atom and Ev was where you were created."

She and I look at each other, not sure what to make of this information. Dad takes us down a set of metallic stairs to the ground floor. I get a better look at the twelve tubes and can't move. Ev takes my hand and grips it tight. If she was at all angry with me from last night the shock of what we see before us, has changed her mind.

The first two tubes are empty but the remaining ten have bodies floating in green liquid. Five males and five female. It has never been a secret that Ev and I were created this way but we thought we were the only ones. I feel betrayed and I just want to run out of there but I can't look away. Each one of them has different skin tones and different hair color.

Dad comes up behind us and puts his hands on our shoulders. "These, my dear Atom and Ev, are the other Genetic Systems. Together you will all be Earth's renaissance. I know this doesn't really make much sense to you and I know you both have tons of questions but I promise you it will all start making sense soon enough. The answers to your questions will make themselves known but if I try to explain it all to you now it will be too much for you to process."

This catches my attention since Ev and I are constantly sitting through hours of classes and being fed books of information that we have to retain in one pass. He's not wrong though. I'm seeing what is directly before me and I have no idea what to make of it. What is the purpose of this? Does it rewrite the purpose I thought I had? I feel like I need to say something. "Why did you bring us down here?"

I don't think he was expecting that question because he takes a moment to answer. "These ten will be released tomorrow and when they are ready

we are going to need you two to teach them. You both are a couple of months ahead of them and we need you to catch them up to speed, especially in the training room. They will be looking for you two to lead them.”

“Is this why there were the other locked rooms in our hallways?” Ev speaks up. I hadn’t thought about that but it makes sense now. They have known that they were going to make twelve of us for a while. My entire perception of who I was and where I was has been turned on its head. The man I called my dad has become a stranger to me. Right now the only person I feel I can trust is standing by my side, holding my hand.

Rene guides us down the path between the tubes. It just doesn’t seem right to call him dad any more. Especially since I now know where I was created. “Yes, Ev. They will be occupying those rooms.” He turns to smile at us but his expression quickly turns south as alarms blare all around us. I look around to see red lights flashing throughout the room and all the scientists running amok.

“What’s happening?” I ask. This has never happened before, at least not that I know of. It seems like everyone else has gone through this before because they are all running with purpose. Some are hitting shut off valves, others are locking down equipment. Ev grips my hand tighter. I don’t object.

Rene ignores us and turns towards the scientists. “Hawk! Watch over these two!” He turns back to us. “Stay here!” As soon as he says it, he’s gone. He bolts up the stairs and into the elevator.

“Come with me you two.” We both startle at the voice and turn. Before us is a man about a foot shorter and fifty pounds lighter than me. I feel I would be able to lift him up with one hand. Hardly the type of guy you would expect with the name Hawk. A pair of glasses that are nearly an inch thick covers his face.

He runs off but I don’t move until I feel Ev tugging on me. I stumble as I catch up and Hawk leads us into a back room adjacent to the monitors. He shuts the door behind us. “Help me with this Atom.” Hawk runs to the other side of a filing cabinet and starts to push. It doesn’t move until I run beside him to help. We move it directly in front of the door.

“What the hell is going on?” Ev shouts. She has found a place against the opposite wall. It seems like she likes to have her back to something when she’s scared. Next to her is a desk with a few old monitors.

Hawk sits at the chair at the desk. “We’re under attack.” He turns on the monitors.

“By who?” I ask as I walk up behind him. Ev stands next to me. This time I reach for her hand. It seems like the appropriate thing to do.

Hawk smacks the monitors a couple of times and they come to life. “The outsiders.”

It’s hard to take in everything I see. The monitors all show different parts of the compound. There are about fifty drones shooting at wave after wave of people scaling over the exterior walls. All of the outsiders have a piece of yellow fabric attached to a part of their body. The ones who make it over the wall open fire on the drones. Their firepower is inferior to that of the drones but their number seems to level the field. There are hundreds of them.

It’s a never-ending stream flowing over the walls. Bodies fall lifeless to the ground. The drones appear to be over powered but instead of retreating, they push forward into the mass of outsiders. It’s as if they have no concern for self-preservation. Just as the original fifty drones are torn apart by the mass of people, fifty more drones march out in unison from their barracks. I had been able to see the barracks from atop the library roof but I had never ventured over there. The shot of the barracks that I see on the screen however show a group of buildings much larger than I anticipated. Thousands of drones could be housed there.

Behind the newest wave of drones, the ground opens up and dozens of rolling machines pour out. I have never seen these before. A drone sits in a clear case on top of a spherical wheel. The wheel allows

the machine to move in any direction and the case can spin around completely. Each clear case is equipped with two guns. “What are those?” I ask Hawk.

“Rollpods.” He says without looking up. The rollpods speed in to the crowd of outsiders and shoot recklessly at anyone within there, including other drones.

I’m so mesmerized by everything that is happening that I haven’t realized that Ev is no longer holding my hand. I look to see that she is sitting on the floor against the side wall. She is visibly upset by this violence. I am about to go to comfort her when an image draws my attention to the screen. Stepping out of the hole where the rollpods came from is Rene. “What is he doing?” I lean closer to the screen.

Hawk seems as confused by it as I am. “He’s just watching.”

“But it’s not safe!” I yell.

Ev quickly comes to her feet and looks at the screen. “Get him to go back in!”

“I can’t do anything from here!” Hawk’s energy has matched ours. He is on edge.

We watch the screens more closely. The rollpods have seized control of the battle and many of the outsiders are retreating. Two outsiders break free and run towards Rene. He turns to run back into the hole as a rollpod turns its aim at the two outsiders. One of

the outsiders gets a shot off before he is gunned down and we all watch as Rene falls to the ground and into the hole.

“Dad!” I scream. I run to the door and push on the filing cabinet. “Let me out of here!”

Ev falls to her knees crying. Hawk runs to me and tries to pull me away from the filing cabinet. “Atom, stop. Stop! You can’t help him. You need to stay here.”

I shake him off and continue pushing on the filing cabinet. It starts to move. “I need to get to him!” A rage has built up inside me.

“You can’t!” Hawk yells back as he puts his hands on my shoulders and pulls me back. Before I realize what I’m doing, I punch Hawk square in the jaw. He falls hard to the ground. I’m instantly sorry that I did that but I have no time for remorse. I have to get to my dad.

I push hard on the filing cabinet and move it out of the way of the door. I reach for the door handle but just before I can pull it open I see a shadow speeding towards my head. The blow of whatever it was knocks me to the ground and I black out.

I open my eyes and the light amplifies the pounding in my head. I sit up and look around. I'm still in the room downstairs. Hawk and Ev are no longer here and the screens have been shut off. It's too quiet. I run out the open door and find myself surrounded by the incubation tubes. The floor is empty. All the scientists are gone. I'm about to run to the elevator when one of the Genetic Systems catches my attention. Her long blonde hair floats beautifully in the liquid. I stop breathing for a moment because even though I can't see her face I know that it's the girl from my dream.

I walk to the side of the incubator but before I can get a good look EV brings me back to reality. "Atom! Come on!" She's standing on the platform just in front of the elevator.

My mind can't shake the thought of this blonde girl but I turn to sprint to Ev. "What happened? How is he?"

She holds the elevator for me as I run in. "He's alive but he's hurt badly."

I feel a sense of relief run through me as we ascend in the elevator. He's alive and that's all that matters to me now. I don't care how betrayed I have

been feeling about the things he has hidden from he. He's still created me. He's still my dad.

The door opens and Ev leads me down a maze of hallways deeper into the scientist quadrant. She pushes through a set of double doors and I step into the medical ward. People in medical masks and green scrubs run around in a panic. "He's lost a lot of blood." I hear one of them say. My brief moments of relief have turned back to concern. I push my way through towards a room where I can see doctors working on someone through the window. It's actually the only room where I see anything happening. Just before I get there Hawk and Grant cut me off, blocking my view.

"Tell me what's happening!" I demand.

Grant grabs my arm and uses all his strength to pull me back towards Ev. "Just let the doctors do their work." He tells me.

I'm about to give in to Grant's strength when I see the doctors in the room begin to panic. Another doctor runs by me. "He's crashing." She says. I break free from Grant's grip and run to the window of the room.

I see Rene, my dad, lying motionless on the operating table in the middle of the room. The doctors strategically place patches on his body and cover him with the glass top of the operating table. One of doctors presses a button on the side of the

table and my dad's body convulses. I pound on the window to the room. "Dad!" Another doctor walks over to the other side of the window and slides the curtains shut. I can no longer see what is going on. "You have to save him!"

Grant and Ev have joined me by the window. Ev puts her hand on my shoulder but I shrug it off. I don't want to be touched. Instead I slide down against the window and sit down against the wall. Ev joins me on the ground. Grant pulls over a chair but sits far enough away to give Ev and I some privacy.

"Why aren't you upset?" I don't look at her.

She shuffles her body closer to me. "It doesn't matter what I feel or how I show it. It won't affect the outcome." I look at her. She's right but I still don't like how indifferent she seems.

"You don't like him, do you?" I search her eyes for the truth.

"Of course I like him Atom. He created me and has been nothing short of generous and kind with me. I have just learned not to get too close." She turns away from me. I have certainly hit a sore spot.

"Why is that?" I press on.

I see tears forming in her eyes. She tries hard to hide them. "There are things that I know, that he hasn't shared with you yet. Things I'm not allowed to share with you...unless something like this happens."

She stands and storms away. Grant doesn't flinch as she walks passed him; he just keeps his eyes on me.

“What is she talking about?” I walk up to Grant. He stays seated in his chair.

“Not right now.” He says as sternly as I've ever heard him. He's concerned. Why wouldn't he be? Ev and I aren't the only family that Rene has. I look around and realize that I was focused so much on my own emotions that I didn't notice the amount of people that have gathered. Every scientist must be here. The number of people who work here is much higher than I would have thought. There must be around 200 scientists that have come to support Rene. A couple dozen drones patrol the perimeter. They too seem to be putting most of their focus towards the room in the center.

I pull up a chair next to Grant. “Why did those people attack us?”

Grant sighs and turns to me. “They want to stop us.”

“What do you mean? Stop us from what?” I'm starting to feel like I have been kept in the dark my whole life. I know nothing of what is going on here or who I am.

“They want to stop us from destroying the world.” He turns his eyes away from me. I'm not sure what to think of this. Rene told me the world was going to end and he always made it seem like we are

the good guys, but good guys wouldn't destroy the world.

“Why are we destroying the world?” I ask. The door to the operating room opens up. Grant is obviously relieved to not have to answer and right now I don't care. I run up to the doctor that walks out of the room. He's a bit portly, short and bald. He's the antithesis of Grant. “How is he?”

Grant has walked up behind me and he places his hand on my shoulder. The doctor ignores me and looks directly at Grant. His grip tightens on my shoulder. “He's alive but he's lost a lot of blood. His status is critical but he should pull through as long as his body doesn't reject the new blood.”

“Thanks Dennis.” Grant takes his hand off my shoulder and extends it to Dennis. They shake.

Dennis turns and heads back towards the room. I reach out and grab his arm. “Can I see him?”

“Not yet, Atom.” He pulls his arm away and walks back into the room. How does he know my name? I have never met him before in my life. Do they all know my name?

I turn to Grant to plea my case but his look keeps me silent. “Go tell Ev.” He says. I don't want to leave but if Grant tells you to do something, you do it. His anger is not something I want to deal with, so I go.

I pass Hawk and a group of scientists along the way. He avoids eye contact with me. His chin is

starting to bruise badly. I feel so bad about what I did. I'm about to apologize to him but I hear Grant yell from behind me. "Ev!" That's all he says. Hawk looks at me briefly and I shoot him a smile but it's not reciprocated.

I walk out and weave my way through the maze of doors and hallways. I pass many armed drones on the way to her room. The door swings inward when I knock so I slowly push it open. Ev is lying on her bed staring up at the ceiling. "He's alive." I say as I sit on the corner of her bed.

"Thanks." She doesn't budge. There are so many questions that I want to ask her but I know now is not the time. She's a bit too emotionally unstable to deal with what I want to ask and I'm not in the right place to receive the answers to those questions. I stand and she turns her head to look at me. "Will you please stay for a little bit?"

I smile and sit back on the corner of her bed. "Sure." She moves her feet and I lay back at the foot of the bed, perpendicular to her. My feet hang off the edge of the bed and I can't help but swing them slightly. I feel comfortable next to her. She calms my nerves.

We lay in silence for a few moments and then she asks me something that hadn't graced my mind yet. "Do you think they attacked because of us?"

I know Grant said that the outsiders came over to stop them from destroying the world, but Rene also told me that I was created because of the end of the world. Am I the reason the world is ending? Is Ev?

“I don’t know.” I say. I don’t like not knowing. As we lay in silence all I can think about is how much has been kept from me. I think about the lies and deceit that has been spent on me. I’m filled with an overwhelming feeling to find everything out. There will be no more secrets kept from me and if Rene doesn’t want to tell me, I will find out on my own.

I stay with Ev until she falls asleep and then I sneak quietly out of her room. The library is the first place I want to go to. I feel I need to learn more about the outsiders. Brianna is probably the person I should talk to but she is probably with the other scientists in the medical ward. Right now the library will have to do.

The number of drones in the hallways is much less in this part of the compound. As I walk towards the wing that has my room and the library a drone approaches me. “Is Dr. Anfang okay?”

A drone has never initiated a conversation with me. They usually only speak in response to a question I have asked them. “He will be.” I reply.

“That’s good.” He smiles. Another thing I haven’t really seen but once.

“80?” I pry. I know I’m probably just making a fool out of myself but he’s the only one I’ve seen smile.

“You remembered? How?” He asks.

“I guessed. You are the only drone who has smiled at me before.” I smile back at him.

He drops his head in shame. “I know. I’m sorry. I won’t do it again.”

“Why would you be sorry?” Everywhere I go it’s nothing but questions.

He doesn’t look at me when he answers. “We aren’t really allowed to engage with anyone but our own. If they knew that I asked you a question without you talking to me first I would get in trouble again.”

“That’s horrible. Who made those rules?” I’m getting angry.

“Dr. Anfang.” He says apologetically.

I stop walking. That can’t be right. Rene would never do that. At least the man I called my dad wouldn’t. Rene however, seems capable of as much evil as good. “Why would he do that?” I’m asking myself as much as I am asking him.

Before he can respond, he shoves me behind him as an outsider jumps out of a door down the hall and shoots his gun. 80 falls back into my arms and knocks me to the ground. Immediately the hallway is filled with more drones and they riddle the outsider

with bullets. I look down to see blood pouring from 80's right eye. "Help!" I scream.

Two drones run over to me. "Are you hurt Atom?"

"I'm fine! 80 has been shot." I lay him on the ground.

The drones look at 80 and one of them places the barrel of his gun on 80's head. "No!" I push the gun out of the way just before it fires. "What are you doing?"

"What we are supposed to do." The drone replies matter-of-factly.

"You can't!" I plea. "He saved my life!" He didn't even hesitate to risk his life for mine. I can't let him die. "We need to get him to the medical ward."

The drone steps towards me. "Sir. Atom. We aren't supposed..."

"I'm not asking you!" I stand and push one drone over to 80's legs. "Pick him up and follow me." They lift him off the ground and I speed them through the hallways to the research and development wing where the medical ward is. Every drone we pass stares at us.

We reach the hallway that has the door with the high tech lock and I see it about to close. "Wait!" The door latches but a second later it flies back open. Hawk stands on the other side.

“What are you doing?” He asks as he holds the door open.

“He’s shot!” I say as we run past him.

“But it’s just a drone!” He shouts after me.

“I don’t care!” We reach the medical ward and burst through the doors. “Grant! I need a doctor!” I yell out to the room. I’m not sure if he is in there, but if he is, I know he will help.

Grant runs over to me. “What happened? Who is this?”

“His name is 80. He was shot.” I push passed him towards the operating rooms.

He chases after me. “Atom, he’s just a drone. We don’t...”

“He saved my life!” I stop and square up to Grant. Our faces mere inches from each other’s. “I don’t care who or what he is to anyone else, his life will be saved! If one more person protests, they will be next on the operating table!” The anger that comes out of me is nothing I have felt before in my life. It scares me but at the same time I want to push it further.

The doctors and scientists must sense that about me because they spring into action. They take 80 from the other two drones and rush him into the operating room adjacent to Rene’s. “He will survive!” I demand as they close the doors.

“Atom.” Grant places his hand on my shoulder. Instantly I feel myself calm down. He tries to get my attention but I keep looking towards 80. “They will take care of him.” The tone in his voice reassures me so I look at him. “Tell me what happened?”

I remember what 80 said about not being allowed to talk to me first, so I make sure not to mention that. “I was heading back to my room when one of the outsiders jumped out from a room at the end of the hall and shot at me. 80 pushed me out of the way and was hit with the bullet instead.”

The expression on Grant’s face turns hard. He grabs my arms tightly and looks right through my eyes. “Is he dead? Is the outsider dead?”

“Yes.” I pull away from him. “Those two other drones shot him.”

“Good.” He turns to the drones. “You two. Get every available drone and do a complete sweep of this compound. I want every room checked. Twice!” The drones run off and he turns back to me. “You come with me. We need to get Ev.”

I look back towards the operating room where I can see the doctors hard at work. “What about...”

“Now, Atom!” He walks through the doors to the medical ward. I jog to catch up. “When you saw the outsider with the gun, what did you do?”

“What do you mean?” I don’t know what he was talking about. Was I supposed to do something?

“What did you do? What were you thinking when you saw him?” He walks faster and I struggle to keep up.

I think back to what I did, which was nothing. “I guess I just stood there. I don’t remember what I was thinking.”

We aren’t too far from Ev’s room but he stops and pushes me against the wall. “Your life is too valuable for you to freeze! The drills, the training that I put you through are not games Atom. They are to help you survive. You run or you fight. That’s how you survive. If you just freeze up. If you don’t do anything, you will die. Do you understand me?”

I’ve let him down and I know it. I have never felt so small. “Yes.” Right then I make a promise to myself to never let him down again.

He lets me go and we make the last few turns to Ev’s room. He pounds on the door. “It’s Grant.”

A few seconds later she answers the door and recoils at the bright light hitting her eyes. “What is it?”

“Grab what you need to sleep in the training room. We’re staying down there tonight.” Grant’s voice is a little gentler when speaking to her.

She looks at me and her eyes grow wide. “Atom! What happened? Whose blood is that?”

I look down and realize that I’m covered in 80’s blood. It’s on my hands and I can feel the sticky

substance on my face. Grant jumps in before I can say anything. “He’ll fill you in downstairs.”

She looks at me and I smile. “I’m fine.” I reassure her. She ducks back into her room and reemerges holding a pillow and a blanket.

We walk to my room. “You can shower downstairs.” Grant tells me before I walk in. I go into my closet and pull out a clean jump suit. I look into the bathroom but decide not to go in there because I don’t want to see what I look like in the mirror. Hopefully there is a towel in the training room shower. I grab my pillow and blanket and walk out.

By the time we reach the training room I feel as though 80’s blood has penetrated deep into my own skin and joined my blood stream. My hands have begun to shake. I throw what I don’t need down and head directly to the shower. I make the water as hot as I can possibly handle, strip down and step in. The water pooling at my feet turns from a clean, clear hue to red. My thoughts flash back to the scene. All of my senses collectively remembering every detail. The sight of the bullet leaving the barrel of the gun and drilling itself into 80. The deafening bang that caused my ears to ring. The weight that my hands felt as 80 fell into my arms. The burning odor of the guns fired by the other drones and the salty taste of 80’s blood hitting my lips. My stomach curls and I can’t

hold anything in. I vomit what seems to be every protein pouch I've had in my brief life.

I crouch down and I can't help but to let the tears come. Everything from the last couple of days has caught up to me. What I thought my life was is nothing more than a veil to what it really is. Lies, fear, pain and death have replaced the false sense of joy that I once felt. As I watch the water turn from red back to clear, I suddenly get it. I know why I'm here. I know what my purpose is. Survive.

I stand with a new sense of understanding and let the hot water hit my face, cleaning any tears that might have stuck to my cheeks. I shut the water off, dry myself and change into my clean jump suit. I toss the old one into the trashcan and walk out to the training room.

What I enter looks nothing like the training room. It is a dense dark forest with moss lining the ground. There is a slightly crisp breeze and I can smell the pine trees. I look up and see a sky filled with stars. I jump when I feel something grab my hand and I look down to see Ev attached to the other end. "I asked Grant if he could put on a simulation. I hope you don't mind. I thought this would be more relaxing."

"It's perfect." I say. She leads me to the center of the room where she has arranged our pillows and blankets next to each other. I spot Grant sitting in a

chair against a far wall. He reads from a tablet in his hands and pays no attention to us. We lay on the ground, staring at the stars, and I tell her everything that happened. I don't miss a single detail, including what 80 told me about the rules Rene has for the drones. I tell her how the drones nearly killed one of their own because he was injured and finally I tell her about the revelation I had in the shower. Aside from asking a few questions, she just listens. When I finish with everything I needed to say we just lie in silence, holding hands, until we fall asleep.

It's still dark when I wake up. I look to my side but Ev is no longer there. I sit up and look around the room but see no sign of Ev or Grant. Just as I get to my feet, Ev walks out from the bathroom drying her hair. "Good morning" she says as she shoots me a smile.

"What time is it?" The simulation is confusing me.

"Eleven." She tosses the towel over a rack and walks over to me.

"In the morning?" I ask.

Ev begins to fold her blanket. "Yeah. Grant said to let you sleep."

"Aperio." The simulation changes back to the training room and I run to the elevator, leaving my pillow and blanket behind. "I need to see if 80 is ok."

"Wait for me." Ev drops her half folded blanket and runs in to the elevator with me.

We jog to the medical ward. The hallways are teeming with drones patrolling the compound. The medical ward has but a small fraction of the people who were here yesterday. It's mostly just doctors in here. Brianna walks over to us.

"Where is Grant?" Ev asks.

"He's working." Brianna answers.

“How is he?” I look towards the operating rooms.

“He’s stable. They put him in a medically induced coma, but Rene should fully recover.” She responds.

“I don’t care about him. How’s 80?” I don’t really mean that. I do care about him but it’s too late, I already said it. I can feel Ev’s disapproving eyes on me.

“The drone is fine. He’s awake if you would like to see him.” She starts walking towards the operating room, anticipating my answer.

I follow and answer as a formality. “I would.”

Brianna holds the door open for Ev and I but she doesn’t follow us in. 80 sees us walk in and places down the tablet he was holding. There is a bandage covering half his face. He looks at us through his one uncovered eye.

“How are you feeling 80?” I stand next to the bed and let Ev take the chair on the other side.

“Why did you do it? Why did you save my life?” His words have fear behind them.

I’m surprised by his question. “Why wouldn’t I? You saved mine.”

“That’s my job.” He says. “As long as I am capable of performing my duties anyway. Which I am now no longer capable of doing. Without both

eyes I can't shoot a gun. I am useless and should have been put down."

Ev places her hand on 80's arm. "But don't you want to live?"

"I want to protect at any cost. That is my sole purpose." 80 pulls his arm away, uncomfortable by Ev's touch.

"Now you can do other things. You don't have to be a soldier." I say. To me this sounds like great news but I see tears running down the side of his face. I look at Ev and she's looking at 80. Her empathy must be stronger than mine because she too has tears rolling down her face.

"Can you guys just let me be?" 80 shuts his eye.

Ev grabs my arm and leads me out. Before we make it out the door I turn back to 80. "Thanks again for saving my life."

"It was my job." 80 wipes his face and we leave. Before I have time to register what's happening Ev drags me in to Rene's room. I don't fight it. Instead I just hold her hand as we stand next to his bed. His eyes are shut and he appears to be sleeping. The glass cover over his body projects what I can only assume are his heart beat, blood pressure and other vitals.

Ev breaks the silence. "Why are you so mad at him?"

I don't look at her. "He lied to me."

“He was just trying to protect you.” She responds.

“I find that hard to believe since he didn’t keep the same things from you that he did from me.” I don’t feel comfortable holding her hand right now so I let go.

She looks at me. “Like what? I don’t know what he has or hasn’t told you.”

“Did you know about the others?” I ask.

“No.”

“Did you know that the drones are supposed to be killed if they are injured?” I press on.

She shakes her head. I can tell she is growing uncomfortable with the questions.

“Did you know about the outsiders and that they might attack?” I look her right in the eye.

“I didn’t. Atom, can we not talk about this right now?” She averts her eyes and I know that she is trying to avoid my next question.

“Did you know that we are the ones who are destroying the earth?” I want her to be as in the dark as I am but I can tell by her body language that she knows.

She takes a deep breath and looks at me with resolve in her eyes. “Yes. You have to understand that he had to tell one of us what are true purpose is.”

“Why didn’t he tell me?” I’m hurt.

“I often wished he did. This is not an easy burden to carry.” She puts her hand on the Rene’s glass case. She looks at him.

I stare at her hoping she will give me more. I grow anxious and I can’t stand in that room surrounded by secrets anymore so I leave. As I walk out I can see Ev sit in the chair next to Rene.

When I get out of the medical ward I weigh my options and instead of heading back to my room, I decide to explore what I can of the scientist’s wing. I try to avoid being seen as I walk but after a while I realize that no one is paying attention to me. The drones and scientists I pass are all going about their business. Most of the hallways look similar to those in Ev and my part of the compound. I can only assume that most of the doors I pass are bedrooms. I poke my head in to a couple of rooms that have ‘Lab’ labeled on them, but they are exactly as advertised. Nothing that I see seems out of the ordinary.

I’m about to head back to my room when I spot Grant at the end of the hallway I am in. He’s hustling towards a set of doors with a keypad so I decide to follow him. I make my way as silently as I can down the hallway but Grant seems too preoccupied with entering his password to notice I’m walking towards him.

When I feel that I’ve gotten as close as I can before he sees me, I duck in to one of the rooms with

the ‘Lab’ label and wait. He finishes deactivating the lock and walks in. I make a quick decision, knowing that if I don’t run now I might not get another chance. So I run for the door as it starts closing.

“Stop!” I hear someone say behind me. I glance back and notice a drone chasing after me. There is no turning back now, so I dive for the other side of the door just before it shuts behind me. I look back through the window of the door and see the drone run off in the opposite direction. They will know I’m in here soon so I better find out what I can.

I see Grant turn the corner at the end of the hall. This hall looks the same as all the others so I have no desire to check in the doors even though I have no idea what this part of the compound is. I decide to follow Grant as far as I can.

After turning down a couple of hallways Grant walks into one of the rooms. The hallways in this part of the compound are empty. There are no drones or scientists walking around. Somehow I get the sense that this is the heart of the compound. I walk up to the door that Grant walked through and see that it’s labeled “Monitor Room”. Chills rush up my spine because I just realized that have probably had cameras on me my entire life. Watching everything I do. It doesn’t really surprise me but I guess that’s one secret I preferred to remain naïve to.

I take a deep breath and slowly push the door open. Luckily there is no one right there so I am able to slide into the room without being noticed. I keep my back against the back wall and am very cautious about making any noise.

What I see before nearly makes me scream. The room is enormous. At least thirty or forty scientists all sit at various stations with monitors in front of them. The monitors are much more advanced than those in the room I was in with Hawk. The scientists swipe the screens and new images appear. All the images on the screens seem foreign to me except for a select group on the left that show the compound.

I search the room for Grant and spot him behind a small group of scientists that are frantically swiping across their screens.

“Put it up on the wall.” Grant demands. One of the scientists does a few things on his screen with his hands and suddenly the wall across from me comes to life and a giant image of the earth appears. I recognize it from pictures I’ve seen in books and holograms, but those pale in comparison to what I see before me. It’s so big and blue. It very easily could be a picture from thousands of years ago because from this distance there is no indication that life has existed. It’s beautiful.

“Let me see Cairo.” Grant says as he walks to the wall. The image zooms from that of the earth to a city

in ruins. It must be near the compound because I see the pyramid as the image focuses on the city center. People run around carrying guns. Others appear to be controlling large machines. The city is overrun with trash and rubble. It is not the organized markets and houses that I read about in the books.

“Get me closer to the ground.” Grant does not avert his eyes from the wall. The giant image reduces to half the size in the middle of the wall. Smaller images frame the center image. These images give closer shots of what I saw before. I see now that amongst the rubble and trash is also sick and even dead people. I stifle a gasp as I witness the pain and loss. “Take them around the city.” Grant tells the scientists.

Almost in unison, about 5 scientists place their palms on their screens and the images rise up in altitude. Manipulating their hands in different directions, the scientists fly whatever cameras they are controlling around the city. By the screens on the wall I can tell that whatever object they are flying has a camera pointed in four different directions, covering a complete panoramic view of the streets. As they fly around the images show that some of the people are moving in a very organized manner. They seem to me transporting guns and scrap metal.

Grant puts his hands on the top of his head. “This isn’t good.” Suddenly two of the screens

project something very odd. They both have dragonflies hovering in the center of the screen. I step closer to get a better look and realize that those are the cameras.

“Atom!” It’s Grant’s voice. This snaps me out of my trance and I realize that I have walked right to the center of the room. Most of the scientists have turned to look at me and Grant’s stare is somehow inflicting pain. “What the hell are you doing here?” He storms at me and leads me out of the room by my arm. His grip will definitely leave a bruise.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to...” I try to plea my case but I know it won’t matter. I’m definitely going to be in trouble.

He looks up and down the hallway. There are two drones at one end. “You two. Take Atom directly back to his room.” He turns his attention to me. “We will talk about this later.”

I don’t object and I just let the drones lead me back to my room. All I want to do is lay in my bed. I shut the door behind me and lay my head on my pillow. I stare at the ceiling, my head swirling with thoughts. The things I saw on the monitors, 80, Rene, the other Genetic Systems, the outsiders, the end of the world. I find it hard to focus on any single thing. They all have me so worked up that I haven’t realized that I have balled up my hands into fists and I am digging my nails into my palms.

I must have been exhausted because before I know it I'm dreaming. I'm flying above the city like the dragonfly cameras and everywhere I look the outsiders are being shot down by drones. I fly in for a closer look and see that every face on the drones is my face. I maneuver closer still to the drones with my likeness and I try hard to stop them from killing the outsiders, but I can't. I'm helpless.

A knock at my door wakes me from my dream. I'm sweating and the sudden knowledge that I am about to get yelled at by Grant doesn't help. I rise to my feet slowly, hoping that maybe he will go away, but instead there is another knock. I answer the door and my fear changes to confusion when I see 80 standing in my doorway. Bandages still covering half his face.

"Hey 80." I step aside to let him in.

He walks in. "I didn't mean to wake you."

"It's alright. What's up?" I sit on my bed and he remains standing.

"I wanted to apologize for earlier." He seems uneasy. "And I wanted to thank you for saving my life."

"Of course." I smile. We both look at each other in silence and then I realize that this might be my best chance to ask him the question that's been brewing in my mind. "Why is it so hard for you to want to live?"

80's shoulders fall. He looks back into the hallway and I realize that he is too scared to talk here. He's probably not allowed to talk about this and he's afraid someone might hear.

I quickly grab my blanket and lead him out my door. We head to the library and climb up to the roof. He follows me without saying a word. I lay the blanket down and sit on it. He sits next to me. The sun is just now dropping below the horizon so the sky is orange and red. I have always loved this time of day.

“What is this place?” He asks.

“It's where I come to think. No one ever bothers me up here. We are safe to talk about anything.” I'm trying to make him feel comfortable.

“What is that over there?” He points to the top of the pyramid.

I smile. “That's the Great Pyramid of Giza. The ancient Egyptians built it over 5,000 years ago to honor the dead.”

“Why would anyone want to honor the dead?” He strains his eyes to get a better look.

That's not something I had thought about before. “I guess it's so that people don't forget them. It's a way to commemorate the accomplishments they had in their life. It gives meaning to their life.”

“Its just life.” He says matter-of-factly.

A part of me knows he's right. There really isn't much to life. I remember about a week ago sitting out here and taking in the size of the universe and realizing that our galaxy is nothing but a dot on the giant cosmic map and that earth itself is nothing more than a dot in our galaxy. Whatever we do here on earth or on mars now, will go unnoticed. Whatever humanity accomplishes together will never be acknowledged, especially once we destroy it. It makes me sad to know this but I guess that's why I spend most of my life thinking on a smaller scale. Ignorance is bliss.

“Is this why it's hard for you to want to live?” I ask.

The slight smile he had on his face is now replaced with a frown. “There is no reason to live. Right now I feel like I'm just occupying space.”

“I guess I just don't understand why you wouldn't want to survive.” I'm frustrated that I can't figure him out.

“It's never crossed my mind. Until today all that was ever on my mind was to protect you and Ev at all costs. I didn't care about myself or what might happen to me. I just followed my orders. Then, as I laid in that bed I started thinking about stuff.” He looks as though he is processing as he speaks. He reminds me a little of the first day after I was born. I was so curious.

“What were you thinking?” I pry.

“Why am I here? When I was part of the Intergers we were never taught to ask why. We just accepted everything as it was. We protect and we die. Those are our only two functions.” He lies back on the blanket. “It all seems absurd. We should want more.”

That was a lot more than I thought would come from him. I had never heard of the Intergers before. That must be what the drones call themselves. It is absurd that protect and die are all they care about. Were they programmed to be that way? I never really thought about the capacity of what the scientists in this compound can do, but it doesn't seem so far fetched. I learned about the mapping of the human genome in one of my classes, so it would be safe to assume that they could isolate certain genes and manipulate them. More questions clutter my head but one thing is certain, there are too many secrets in this compound and I am tired of being in the dark. I don't care how much trouble I get into; I am going to find out everything I can about what they are doing here and more importantly, why I was created.

80 turns to me. “What do you think they are going to do with me?”

“What do you mean?” I ask.

“Well, they can't use me for protection anymore and I'm clearly not a scientist.” He smiles at me and I

chuckle. His little joke is the most human thing I have seen him do. It almost seems like he is evolving as we speak.

“I really don’t know. There are a lot of things I don’t know about here but I am hoping to change that.” I really am.

80 winces in pain and slowly sits back up. “I’m going to head back to the medical bay. My head is starting to hurt again.” He stands and walks over to the ladder. “Thanks for talking with me.”

“I’m here almost every night. Come up any time you like.” I smile at him and he smiles back as he climbs down.

It’s fairly warm tonight so I decide to curl up with my blanket and sleep up here. I would rather not be disturbed right now and a large part of me is afraid to face Grant. I know he won’t find me up here. I look up at the vast, dark night sky above me and though there are so many things that could be occupying my mind, I fall asleep thinking how small and insignificant I am.

Over the next three days I try to stay under the radar. Ev and I's classes resume. We learn about art and music. Some of it doesn't make sense and I just don't understand. Brianna says that everything that is artistic is subjective but that doesn't seem to be the case with Ev. She seemed to love everything. It even brought her to tears a few times. Our training sessions with Grant were postponed because of all the work he was doing in that surveillance room. In fact, I haven't seen him since the incident in the surveillance room. I'm hoping that he's forgotten that he is mad at me.

80 came to visit me on the roof once. He asked me about all the things that Ev and I had been learning and I happily shared. He seemed to take a genuine interest in biology and chemistry. I asked him about Breckbal. He explained that it's a game where two teams of six attempt to get balls into the other team's pit, a four foot hole in the ground at the opposite end of the field. He said that there are no rules as to how a team gets a ball into the pit and that the games would get so physical that drones would get injured and have to be put down. The game sounds very dangerous, which may be why I'm dying to play it.

When I woke up today though, something felt off. People seemed to be a little more on edge and there seemed to be more activity in the hallways than usual. Ev seemed to have picked up on it as well because after our morning class she walks with me back to my room.

“Have people seemed a little weird to you today?” She asks.

“Yes. They all seem tense. What do you think is going on?” I open the door to my room. She walks in and I follow. Before I am able to close the door I hear someone call out my name. The deep and slightly threatening tone can only belong to one person. Grant. I sit on my bed next to Ev and wait. “He’s a little angry with me. You may not want to be around for this.”

“What did you do?” She looks at me, concerned. I hadn’t told her about my expedition to the surveillance room. If she sticks around I won’t have to.

Grant appears in the doorway and Ev stands. “Actually Ev, you should stay.” She sits back down and I can tell she’s a bit scared because she grabs my hand. We hadn’t really touched each other for days and I forgot how it felt because I am surprised by how fast my heart is beating and how nervous I suddenly get.

I know he hasn't forgotten about my sneaking around so I try to diffuse the tension I'm feeling.

"I'm sorry about..."

"Atom, you need to observe boundaries and not go where you aren't supposed to." He's gentler than I expected.

"Why?" I know I'm stoking the flame.

"For your own protection. There are things that you aren't meant to see." He responds.

I can tell that he is trying to remain calm and that's having the opposite effect on me. "Protect us from what? Why are you hiding things from us?" I snap.

He takes a deep breath. "This is not a discussion Atom. You will do as you are told."

I stand. "Or else what? You will kill me like you do the drones? You won't let me destroy the world with you?" My face feels warm from the blood that has rushed up to my head. I would have never imagined that I'd be yelling at my favorite teacher.

Grant looks at Ev. "You should tell him."

"You tell me you coward!" I scream at him.

He clenches his fists and holds back a punch that I'm sure he wishes he could throw. Instead he turns to walk out. "I thought you should know that Rene is being woken up in a couple of hours." With that he shuts the door behind him.

“What is up with you?” Ev puts her hand on my shoulder. I know she’s just trying to calm me down.

“Tell me what?” I turn and lean my back against the door. I am not going to let her leave until I get the answer I want.

“Please sit Atom, you’re making me nervous.” She moves further down on the bed and I sit on the end.

I take a few deep breaths and try to calm myself down. “Please tell me everything. I don’t want to have any secrets between us.”

“I don’t either.” She grabs my pillow and holds it up to her stomach as if to protect herself. “What do you know about the end of the world?”

“Just that we are the ones who are going to destroy it.” I turn to face her to make sure that I can see her eyes. I want to make sure she doesn’t lie.

“Well that’s not entirely true. It’s Rene and the other scientists that intend on destroying the world. More specifically, they plan to wipe out humanity.” She’s been struggling with this information for a while.

It still doesn’t make sense to me. “Why?” I ask.

“I asked Rene the same thing and what he told me was that human race was driving itself extinct. Wars, disease, famine were all taking its toll on humans. He said that in the last 100 years the population had been cut by more than half because

the ice age forced the hand of chaos. He believes that the only way to truly save the human race is to start over.” She grips my pillow tighter.

“Is that what you believe?” I’m not sure what answer I want to hear.

“I don’t know. I didn’t think so, but that attack on the compound a few days ago has made me reconsider. They were such savages. Not just the outsiders, but everyone. The drones, the scientists, everyone.” A couple of tears roll down her face and she wipes them on my pillow. I wonder how many tears have graced her pillow.

“What about us?” I’m afraid of the answer I’m about to get. Whatever it is, I don’t believe it will be what I want to hear.

She looks deep into my eyes. “You and I, and I’m guessing the other Genetic Systems as well, we are the restart. When everything and everyone else is gone, we are supposed to find E.D.E.N and start the human race over.”

Suddenly I’m scared and I don’t feel comfortable around Ev anymore. She and I are supposed to restart humanity? Why? Does it have to be her and me? Now a lot of things begin to make sense. All the education and training was intended to help us survive and pass along our knowledge. The constant watchful protection by the drones. All of it to make sure this project is successful. I am suddenly struck

with the fear of failure. If we don't succeed humans will become extinct. Everything that ever was will be forgotten and unless the colonies on Mars have survived since communication was lost nearly 200 years ago, the Solar System will be devoid of intelligent life.

“Where is E.D.E.N.?” I ask.

“Rene didn't say exactly. He just said north, under the ice and snow.” Ev replies. She looks like she's had a huge weight lifted off her shoulders. She places my pillow down and stands. “I think I'm going to head back to my room and rest my head before I go see Rene. Are you going to be there?”

I think for a second. He is still my father, I should be there. “Yes.”

“Good.” Ev leans in and kisses my cheek before she walks out. I'm glad she left because I can feel that I have turned bright red and I let out a high-pitched sound I've never heard before.

My mind struggles with the idea of Ev and I being created to restart humanity. If I can't even handle a kiss on the cheek, how am I supposed to do that? I look down and see that my left hand is shaking. I try to stop it but it won't. I'm too anxious and need to relax so I walk into my bathroom for a hot shower. I lay on the ground with my eyes closed and let the hot water hit my body. I try to picture

myself lying on the roof of the library and the warm rain hitting my body.

Just as I'm about to doze off, I hear a knock on my door. Part of me wants to ignore them and lay here until morning, but I realize that someone has probably come to take me to Rene. I shut off the water, dry myself and throw on a clean outfit.

When I open the door I see a drone with an eye patch covering his left eye. "80?"

He taps his eye patch. "You like it?"

"Yeah. It looks bad ass." I'm happy to see him. I would rather it be him that brings me to Rene.

"Follow me." He walks off towards the library, away from the medical ward. I don't question him, I just follow. He leads me to one of the doors before the library and out into the open field between the main buildings and the wall.

This is where the battle against the outsiders took place. I look down and see that the blades of grass are still stained with blood. They moved the bodies while Ev and I were down in the simulation room. He is definitely not taking me to see Rene. "Where are we going?"

"I have a surprise for you." He looks back and smiles and picks up his pace to a light jog. I have no choice but to follow as he makes it to the wall.

“They are going to be waking up Rene soon.” My heart is pumping. Whatever 80 has planned has got me excited.

“I know. It’s the perfect time.” He works his way down the wall, checking his surroundings as he goes.

“For what? What are we doing?” I mimic every action he does as he ducks his way to the corner of the wall.

“To go to the pyramid.” He shoots a giant smile at me and I can’t help but reciprocate. “Everyone will be focusing and paying attention to Rene, so no one will notice us leaving.”

What we are about to do is so wrong and will get me in so much trouble. Ever since I saw the top of the pyramid from my vantage point on the roof I have wanted to see it up close. Before I am able to even think about objecting I see 80 scaling the corner of the wall like a spider. He places his hand on one stone and then his foot in another. I do my best to follow his path as we climb the thirty-foot wall.

He is every bit as physically able as I am but he seems to possess a lot more fearlessness. My hands shake as I look down at the drop beneath me. One miscalculation and I could very easily fall to my death. 80 makes it to the top and looks around.

I’m about to reach up for the top of the wall when my foot slips on one of the stones. My heart stops as I begin to fall and the only thing that crosses

my mind is that I failed Ev. I am snapped back into the moment when 80's hand grabs mine, stopping my 30 foot plunge. He pulls me up and I regain my bearings at the top of the wall. That close brush with death has made me reconsider this adventure. "I shouldn't be doing this. We should go back."

"Stop!" Three drones are running at us from different directions.

"Too late. Go!" 80 has ushered me to the edge of the wall and before I know it I'm climbing down on the other side. 80 is on the wall right behind me. We make it to the ground and run in the direction of the first place we can find cover. It appears to be an old metal shack that has had most of its metal, rusted, stolen or blown off. We crouch behind it, both breathing heavy and trying to catch our breath. We look at each other and laugh.

We barely have time to think before we are off and running again. This time in the direction of the pyramid. The bottom is obscured by the city before us but I see more of the top than I ever have. The city is a mix of steel and glass buildings with stone and metal huts. It's a plethora of juxtaposition with no middle ground. The only thing that they all have in common is that they have been worn down, torn apart or blown apart. Anxiety grips me, as we get closer to the border. The outsiders do not seem like a

welcoming people and we are running into unknown territory for both of us.

“Come over here.” 80 waves me over to a pile of rubble. “We need to change out of these clothes. We’ll stand out to the outsiders if we don’t.”

“What would happen if they spot us?” I step next to 80 as he bends down and grabs something.

“They’d kill us.” 80 pulls a body of a young man from under the rubble. The smell coming from his body is repugnant. His entire left arm is missing and his face is covered with blood. Through the blood his dead, empty eyes stare up at me. My stomach tightens and I look away.

“I’m not wearing a dead man’s clothes.” I try hard to keep everything in my stomach.

“Atom, it’s the only way. Nobody outside of the compound wears what we have on.” He says. “Just don’t look at their faces.”

I take a deep breath and turn to see that 80 has already pulled a second body and is midway through changing. I walk over to the second body and slowly pull off his outer layer. “How are you able to do this?”

“I have been around death since I was created. The integers are expendable, so they wouldn’t even bother fixing someone with a broken leg. They just replace them with someone new. I’m not the first one

named 80.” He jumps back in to the rubble and scavenges.

This reminder of the lack of humanity the scientists show towards the drones reignites my anger towards Rene. It confirms my resolve to make it to the pyramid and defy him. These thoughts help me get through the daunting task of putting on a dead man’s clothes. I finish changing and 80 steps out of the rubble holding a handgun and a long staff. He hands me the staff and conceals the gun in his pants.

“Let’s go.” 80 heads into the city.

I follow. “How do you know which way to go?”

“I’m just walking to the giant structure in the center of the city.” He puts his arm around my shoulder and I smile. For a moment I feel we are brothers.

As we walk deeper into the city the density of people increases. 80 was right, no one is paying attention to us. My nerves calm and my senses seem to kick in to high gear. The first thing to hit me is the smell. It is one of the most pungent odors I have ever experienced. There is a hint of sweat and smoke, but the main culprit seems to be rotting flesh, much like from the dead body whose clothes I am wearing. My skin feels clammy and I realize that it is at least fifteen degrees hotter here than at the compound.

The only thing that seems to be pleasant in this repulsive city are the sounds of a steady beat I hear. “What do you think that is?”

“I don’t know.” 80 turns down a street and heads towards the sound. “Let’s find out.”

I would be turning away from the pyramid, which is what I really want to see, but I am just as curious to explore the sounds. It doesn’t take us long to get to the source as we are suddenly greeted by a wall of people all looking towards the center. “I think it’s a party.”

80 looks at me with dead eyes. “I don’t know what that is.”

I’m surprised by what he just said. Then I remember that there are many things that I am sure he hasn’t experienced. “It’s a gathering for a celebration.”

“Ok.” He responds, unsure. “What about the sound? And the smell?”

“The sound is music. Nothing I have heard before.” I listen closer. It’s very drum heavy and rhythmic. Suddenly a second smell hits me. It’s a type of burning, but this one is making my mouth water. “I don’t know what that smell is.”

We try to look around the crowd but my gaze is pulled away when I hear a buzzing by my head. I look and spot one of the dragonfly cameras. They are much smaller in person and had I not seen one before

I wouldn't be any wiser to what it is. I swat at it but it doesn't move.

“They found us.” I say.

80 turns and looks around. “What do you mean?”

I point to the dragonfly. “That's a camera.”

Before I know it, the staff has been pulled from my grasp and 80 smashes the dragonfly camera.

“Run. Go!”

We take off towards the pyramid. If I am going to get caught, I want to be able to see the pyramid before they reach me. As we run a few more dragonflies give chase. We do our best to avoid being spotted, but there are too many, so we decide to just run straight for the pyramid.

Everything slows down as the majestic structure that I have been coveting reveals itself to me. I had seen many pictures but none of them prepared me for the way I would feel. There is obvious wear on the pyramid and one of the corners seems to have been blown off, but I still can help but feel humbled. Humans built this stunning work of art over fifty centuries ago and no one in this city seems to have even an inkling of respect for it. Suddenly, my purpose seems clearer. I wasn't created to only save the human race. I was created to also save it's history.

“It’s amazing.” 80 says and he snaps me out of my head.

“It truly is. Thank you for bringing me out here, but we need to get back.” I turn to head back to the compound.

80 doesn’t move. “What do you think they’ll do to me?”

“What do you mean?” I look at him.

“I brought you out here. They are not going to be very happy about that.” He looks up at me and for the first time I see a fear of death in his eyes.

“I won’t let them do anything to you. You are my friend and you saved my life. I will never forget that.” I walk on and he jogs up next to me. We weave our way through the city and past the party.

“Hang on a second.” 80 runs off towards the party, leaving me alone. I stand off to the side to try to avoid any attention.

Just as 80 turns the corner and older man with spotted facial hair steps in front of me. “Where did you get those shoes?”

I look down and see that the brightly colored shoes are in complete contrast to the rest of the clothes I’m wearing. “I found them.”

The old man studies me. “Where?”

My heart races because I know whatever answer I give him will be the wrong answer. “I don’t remember.”

“You’re lying.” The old man pins my shoulders against the wall and then looks back. “Petros!”

A giant man walks out of the shadows. His face covered in scars. “What?”

“I think he’s from inside the walls.” The old man grabs the staff out of my hand and tosses it aside.

Petros steps right up to me. His face close enough to smell his breath. “He’s too young to be one of the scientists. He must be one of the clones.”

“You think he’s one of the guards or one of the Genesys?” The old man prods at me.

“I don’t care.” Petros turns to walk away. “Kill him.”

The old man pulls a gun from his pants and aims it at my head. My eyes go wide and my instincts take over. I kick off the wall, knocking the old man back. His gun goes off but misses me by a few feet. I grab the arm with the gun, sweep my leg over his head and arm and take him down to the ground. With one quick motion I break his arm over my leg and pull the gun from his hand. The old man screams in pain, pulling Petros’ attention, as well as a few others.

They all pull their guns on me so I duck behind a barricade of rubble as they fire their rounds in my direction. Pieces of glass and concrete fall on me as I try to recall my training with Grant. I wish he was here to tell me what to do but I know all he would say is to figure it out and use my head.

I look up and spot a dragonfly hovering above me. I know now that all I have to do is fend them off long enough and help will be here. I look at the building behind me and see in the reflection of the little glass left that there are about nine people shooting at me. It won't be long before more join in. Off to the side I see another reflection, 80. He's hiding behind a building a half block down and is signaling something with his hands. I look closely and realize that he's telling me to go in to the building.

I do my best to stay low and I crawl in through one of the broken windows of the building. The floor is littered with rubble and old office paraphernalia. A buzzing by my head causes me to flinch and I turn to see the dragonfly camera. It's following me.

“He's inside!” The old man yells.

I look around the floor for a way out when the dragonfly takes off and hovers towards a door against a far wall. I run to the door and push but it catches on some rubble on the other side. The opening is big enough for the dragonfly to squeeze through but I can barely get my arm through. I push as hard as I can against the door and it begins to slowly move. A shot goes off by my head and I turn to see the outsiders streaming in through the same window I came through. I fire a couple of shots in their direction and crouch low for cover.

“Come out, come out.” Petros sings from the other side of the floor. “We promise to kill you nice and quick.”

Bullets whiz by me and I know that I have nowhere else to go. I lean my back against the door and it flies open, causing me to fall to my back. 80 stands above me and he shoots his gun at the outsiders.

“Go!” He yells. “Up the stairs!”

I crawl through the door and see that I am in a stairwell. The dragonfly hovers on the first flight of steps and then takes off. I follow it up the stairs as fast as I can. 80 trails behind me, turning from time to time to shoot at our pursuers. Our enhanced genetics are definitely an advantage as we create distance between the outsiders and us. Most of them have slowed to a walk up the stairs while 80 and I continue a jogging pace.

“Go as fast as you want. Eventually the stairs will end and we will catch up.” Petros screams up to us.

We reach the top of the stairs and push through to the roof. “He’s right you know.” I say.

“Don’t worry about that. Help me find something to block the door.” 80 searches around the roof.

The dragonfly hovers by my head and I look around at the skyline. We must be around forty floors

up. To the north I make out the smoke from the party and behind it the pyramid. In the other direction I can spot hints of the compound. I wonder how Rene is doing. Has he been told that I snuck out? What will he do to 80, knowing that he put me in danger?

Gunfire snaps me back to the current situation. I turn to see 80 shooting at the base of a giant exhaust vent. He waves me over. "Help me push this in front of the door."

I run to his side and see that he shot off the rusted parts around the bolts that held the vent down. We push the vent together and get it in front of the door as the first outsider attempts to push it open. We have bought ourselves some time, but not much.

"What now?" I realize that I should have been the one with the plan. That's what I have been training for. Grant would be disappointed in me, but I also understand that to 80 it's just instinct.

"We wait." 80 looks off towards the compound.

"For what?" I ask.

"That." He points to a craft that is coming out of the field to the compound. I can't quite make it out but I know I have never seen it before.

More outsiders have reached the door and are slowly pushing the vent out of the way. 80 and I lean against the vent but I know that we won't be able to hold them all off for too much longer.

The dragonfly takes off to the edge of the building. The craft that approaches us resembles the dragonfly but with smaller, stationary wings. Each wing and the tail have a glowing green circle that seems to be the source for its power and ability to fly. It reaches the building and hovers right next to the dragonfly. The side door opens and I see Grant standing inside.

“Run!” Grant yells.

We take off towards the flying craft. Behind us we hear the vent scrape as the door gets pushed open. Bullets fly by us and hit the ground at our feet. Suddenly I feel a painful sting on my right arm and I fall to the ground. I look up to see 80 jump on to the craft.

“Atom! Get up!” He screams.

I do but I can't run towards him because he and Grant are firing at the outsiders. There are definitely more than there was before. The outsiders turn their fire towards the craft causing it to back away. I use the opportunity to run towards the other side of the building. A few outsiders spot me and fire. I duck and dodge as best as I can. In front of me the craft is making its way back to the building.

My body seems to have taken over because instead of slowing down as I reach the edge of the roof, I'm speeding up. I need to make the leap from this building into the moving aircraft. My speed and

timing need to be perfect because if I miss, I'm dead. As I charge forward I push the fear back and jump off the edge. Nothing is in front of me and for a moment I feel that I have made a mistake. Before my body starts its descent the craft pulls up in the path I anticipated and I hit the ledge of the side door. 80 and Grant grab my arms and pull me in as the craft heads back to the compound.

Grant closes the side door and head for the front of the aircraft.

"I'm sorry." I cry out before he disappears. I look at 80. "Why did you leave me back on the ground?"

He smiles. "I went back to the party because I had seen them eating something. I wanted to get us some. They were calling it chicken."

I remember learning about chickens. They are a flightless bird. The thought of eating one did not sit well in my stomach. "I'm glad you didn't..."

"Here." 80 hands me a small greasy bone with meat on it. It feels dirty in my hand and it reminds me of the dead bodies we saw. I look up at 80 and he's tearing a piece of the meat off in his mouth. He speaks as he chews. "This is amazing! So much better than those pouches." He tears off another piece."

I smell it and the odor is actually quite sweet with a bit of a kick. Staring scared at the meat I

chuckle because I realize that I just jumped off of a building into a moving aircraft and I am afraid to try this. I take a bite and instantly fall in love with the taste. The juicy texture floods my mouth and the sweetness has a hint of orange. There is an aftertaste that is not unlike smoke but its perfect. “Do you have more?”

80 pulls two more from his pocket and hands me one. We laugh as we eat the bones clean.

We land in the middle of the field and two drones run up and take 80 away. I give chase but Grant pulls me back by the collar. “Let him go!”

“He’ll be fine.” Grant says but I’m not sure if I can believe him. He leads me in to the building and straight for an elevator. I’m too preoccupied to realize that I have been in this elevator before. When the doors open I recognize that we are in the Center for G.O.D.

“Why are we down here?” I ask. He doesn’t answer and leads me down to the ground. We pass the incubation tubes but they are all empty. “Where did they go?” I look around but again, he doesn’t answer.

“Hawk. He doesn’t come out until I say so. Make sure of it.” Grant grabs a bag off of one of the tables and leads me into the back room. He hands the bag to me and shoves me into the room.

I turn but before I can take a step the door slams in my face and I hear a series of locks click. “What are you doing? Let me out!” I slam my fists against the door. “Don’t kill him! It’s not his fault! Don’t kill him!”

I pound on the door until my hands and head hurt. Tears streak down my face and I sit on the ground. I close my eyes and let the tears come until I fall asleep.