

DESTROY EDEN

I patiently stood in front of the door while several guards aimed their sleek, glowing weapons toward my head. The guards were soulless human beings, clones programmed to do just one thing until the day they died, protect the CEO. They were in a deep trance, hypnotized by our government, Depth Technologies.

The doors slid open, and I finally saw what my father and my father's father could have only ever dreamed of seeing—the seat of the world, the CEO's office. It was the most elegant, narrow room, positioned in the tallest structure ever built by mankind. Out the window there was sun above the clouds, so serene and peaceful. It was hard to imagine that a kilometer below us a terrible evil was being perpetrated by that man, the man standing in front of the large, curvaceous window. He looked out over his empire, the empire that I was about to take from him.

That was the CEO. I couldn't believe it. He looked so young, and he wasn't nearly as tall as I thought he would be. He was nothing. He was the same as me when I was much younger. He turned around and showed me his face. He was a handsome young man with striking, chiseled features, and he wore the finest, most comfortable suit ever conceived by mankind. "Welcome, free-thinker," he said in a low, quiet voice. He smiled.

I stepped inside, and the doors closed behind me. We were alone, the two of us. At this point, I gripped the small sphere I'd been carrying even tighter than

before. I couldn't trust this man, no matter how harmless he seemed.

"Sit, please sit."

"I'd rather stand," I said firmly.

"But, sir," he insisted, "you seem so tired. A man of your age... I only just learned of you several days ago. You must have been traveling by foot for a week to get here, wherever it is you came from. I admire that. You look as though you are about to faint right here in front of me."

"I am not going to let you trick me into giving up this sphere. One misstep and I'll drop it, right here, right now, and everything you thought was yours forever will be the people's."

He shook his head and sighed. "I'm not about to trick you, or attempt to kill you, or anything of the sort. Do you know how long it's been since my father died?" It was a rhetorical question. "Fifteen years. That's how long it's been since I talked to a free-thinker. Please, sit. I offer you anything you'd like to drink, to eat even. You must be hungry."

I looked away. "You're not going to get anywhere," I said. "I knew this would be a waste of time." I held out the sphere and loosened my grip on it for a short moment.

"No, no... Not yet. Not now. I believe you." Just as the CEO was about to call me "old man" he said instead, "Mister..."

"My name is Henry. Just Henry."

"I believe you, Henry. I believe that this is the end. I beg of you, though, please enjoy these last few moments with me."

"Fine, I'll sit," I said. "But you know the consequences of deceit."

"I know. You'll drop the sphere. I also know that you are going to drop it anyway."

I approached one of the chairs in front of his desk and sat down, giving him no response. The chair was so comfortable, so cozy. I wanted to sit there forever with my head leaned back. I could have fallen asleep, but that's what he wanted me to do. I'd come this far. Nothing could stop me.

Nothing.

The CEO sat himself down in the large chair on the side of the desk opposite me. He looked at the sphere still clenched within my hand, then he looked back at me. "To drink, Henry?"

"Excuse me?"

"What would you like to drink?" he asked again. "You can have anything you'd like."

For a moment, I started believe that he was really interested in my welfare. Maybe he was, but all I could think about were the old drinks my grandfather used to tell me about when I sat next to him under the dim light of our underground lab. Carbonated soda he called it. Root beer. Root beer was his favorite. He would have given up almost anything to have just one sip. "Root beer," I said. "I'd like some root beer."

The CEO laughed. "An old twentieth century drink," he said. "I could have guessed. Coming right up, as they used to say." He tapped a button on his desk and a glass full of cold root beer materialized in front of me. I reached out to grab it. It was real as anything I'd ever held before.

"I'm assuming that drink is nearly as old as your tattered clothes," he added with a smirk on his face.

"When you're hiding in a cave for fifty years, things tend to get a little dirty."

"A cave, eh?"

"It was the only way to escape the drones of your hypnotic devices."

"So that's how you were able to stay a free-thinker. Amazing. How did you occupy yourself all that time?"

"I spent my life working on this," I said, motioning to the sphere in my hand, "just as my father and his father did. We dedicated our lives to developing the nanites within this sphere. Trillions of microscopic robots designed to destroy the part of the human brain that allows lies to exist as truths, that allows your empire to hypnotize people into becoming defenders of the corporate state."

"Brilliant. Simply brilliant. Our scientists could have developed something similar in days, but a free-thinker..." The CEO could have gone on, but he had to ask the question that had been burning in his mind ever since he heard of me. "Tell me, Henry, what provokes a person to destroy Eden?"

This was where the formalities ended. "Eden? If this is Eden, you must be the snake."

"No, Henry. I'm God."

"I expected you to say as much."

"Just look outside, Henry. Look. This is perfection. This is human civilization at its height. People live out their lives in perfect blissfulness. They are happy *all of the time*. You're about to take that from them."

"They are living in ignorance. They are slaves."

"But they are happy," he contended.
"No human would want anything more."

"They want their freedom."

He didn't respond right away. He just looked into my eyes, staring at me, trying to read what I was about. "Your eyes," he said. "Those broken eyes that sit behind those broken glasses. That's freedom, the freedom to live with a disability. None of our people live like you do, in pain, in agony, deep inside a dark cave toying with your subversive equipment. Freedom is chaos, Henry. Freedom is death."

"The good cannot be the good without the bad," I said to him. "I am only restoring the balance. The rest is for them to decide."

"And they will decide on misery," he replied.

"Whatever it will be, it will be their choice."

He shook his head. There was nothing more that could be said. Agree to disagree? Never. He would let his empire die with what little honor it ever had. He would add no more to the argument. Instead, he asked, "Why have you not taken a drink yet?"

I set the glass back down on his desk and replied, "It's not real."

He closed his eyes, disagreeing silently. At last, he looked up at me and said, "This conversation is over. Let it be done." And with that, I dropped the sphere. It shattered on the floor and the invisible nanites buzzed throughout, gradually making their way out of the room, down the flights of the building, and eventually across the globe.

This was my choice.

This was freedom.

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