

“Don’t jump!” he yelled. “Its too risky!”

“Too bad!” I yelled back. And there I fell. Tumbling towards the ground as the cold wind blew. As I fell towards the earth, I picked up loads of speed. I was on the ground in an instant. The ground was hard and soft at the same time. Being hard because it’s a solid, but soft because of the fog. It was this instant I blacked out.

I woke up in a hospital. IV’s in my arm. Plugs on my chest. Filth in my hair. Holes in my head. Ice in my veins. And still I persist. Wanting to function. Functioning. Moving. Running down hall. Hitting nurse. Diversion. Avoid steel cart. Break through security door. Combat. Left arm take down. Run through door. Dodge first hit. Dodge second hit. None. Hit floor with wind knocked out of self. Game over.

“Well that was weird,” I mused to myself as I stood up and observed my surroundings. To the east, strange city rose over the hills of the orchard. I estimated three miles; it was certainly the best way to go, considering I was otherwise surrounded by forest. I started at a jog, but my knees were weak from the flight. On the way to the city, it felt like eons of ice. I slipped and slid on the morning dew, and I wheezed my way over fences. Cows and chickens watched me curiously as I scrambled helplessly through their muck and grain. Filthy and exhausted, I scrambled into a run down shack. Just a few hundred yards from the city, I wondered how the people of the city couldn’t smell the odor coming from the shack. The musty air pierced my lungs as I collapsed to the floor. Exhaustion overpowered me. I fell out cold to the ground.

Poke. I woke with a start.

“What the hell are you doin’ in mah’ shack, boy?” said a gruff voice from behind me. Another sharp jab. “Boy, speak up!”

It was hard to look up, never mind speak up. As my eyes began to focus, and my neck gained strength, I gazed up at a battle worn face. There was an enormous gash on the right side of his face, running from the bottom of his lip, through his eye, and stopped just above his eyebrow. His eye had been replaced with what looked like a robot eye. Cold hatred ran through its circuits, but the other side of his face was warm and welcoming. I swallowed. “Where am I? Am I still in that dreadful shack?”

“Why yes son indeed you are.”

“Blimey! What this used for, washing donkey’s pits?”

“ So close. It’s used for cleaning cow buttocks.”

“ Oh, please!”

“Let me help yer up there, pardner,”

“So what is this place?”

“Yer not from around here are ya’?”

“You could say that.”

“Well, this used to be the Vatican City, before they came. More than 800 souls were lost that day,”

“You mean there’s no one in that town?” I said with a nervous tone. I was hoping to find help in the city. So close.

“Up until they came, it was a city of enor-“

“ Wait, who’s *they*?”

“Prometheans. A highly advanced alien civilization, and as far as I know they created this place.”

“The town?”

“The universe. Now as I was saying...”

“They can’t possibly have created the universe. It’s been around for millennia!”

“How do you think the Egyptians built their pyramids? Why do you think Alexander was so great? They have been among us since before we were even here. Anyway, the city was full of prosperity and diversity. One day, a solemn farmer was wandering these very fields, thinking about why he had lost his entire crop had just simply vanished. All he could find were a few scrape marks that led to a cave just a few hundred away in the side of an overgrown mound. That foolish boy went over to look around. He found the cave and peeked in, but fell into a massive underground mining operation. He barley escaped with his life. Before he managed to get away, they ran a few tests...”

“ That was you, wasn’t it? You’re the boy who escaped from the Prometheans!”

“Yes... they ran many experiments on me. One went wrong, and that is how *this* happened,” He pointed to his treacherous wound. “ I did manage to escape with one thing though: a book.”

“The Book of Ages. I thought that was written by the Paletainans.”

“It was given to them after the War between the good Prometheans and the bad Prometheans. The good Prometheans were losing, so they had to find another intelligent race to

bestow their knowledge. They knew humans were reckless and wasteful, but the right person would come along and save us all.”

“But why the Paletainans?”

“The Izrolits and the Paletainans were in an fight for control of the control. The good Prometheans sided with the Paletainans and the evil Prometheans sided with the Izrolits. The good Prometheans knew they had lost, and as soon as they went, the bad Prometheans would crush the Paletainans. The Prometheans gave a special man...”

“The Fourth Liberator!”

“Yes, they gave the Fourth Liberator the Book of Ages and the Liberator wiped out the evil Prometheans. That is why the Paletainans still remain in Isrol today and haven’t been wiped off the face of this planet. But some bad Prometheans survived...” he trailed of a look mournfully at the city.

“So how did you get the book?”

“The bad Prometheans came back and took the book from the Liberator’s dead hands. Without the book, they cannot survive.”

“But what about the city?”

“They came looking for it, but I hid it *real* good.”

“Where?”

“In my soul. I memorized the book and then burnt it to a crisp. Right in front of their very eyes.”

“So that means they’ve stopped looking for it right?”

“No, they are just underground, perfecting a way to harvest souls. But first, let’s go inside for a drink.”

By inside, he meant go into dead person’s home. He wandered around, knocking things over and taking their possetions. He grabbed things here and there. Gold watches, gold rings, anything gold. I found it kind of weird that he only took gold things, but I decided that was not important right now. We wandered through several rows of block buildings, trashing places up and throwing things out windows. One piano went out the window with exceptional force.

WANG! CRASH!

“Heavens, man, what have you been drinking, some energy stuff infused with vodka and steroids? Even I couldn’t do that on a good day!”

“Do what?” he said as if he had done nothing abnormal, like he didn’t just hammer throw a piano out the window and across the street.

“Throw a bloody 700 pound piano out the window!”

“Oh... uh... gotta go upstairs... for a second...”

This wasn’t right. He had been wandering through these houses, picking up gold things and throwing objects that were rather heavy with no strain at all. At one point I heard him whisper something about “the invasion being postponed” or something like that. Now he was headed up the stairs, opening a small leather pouch as he went. I decided to follow.

As I neared the top of the stairs, I heard a weird crunching noise, like someone was eating ice cubes. I saw him in a corner, but it wasn’t him. But it was. It was part of him because his head and limbs were normal, but his back was all arched. It looked a bit like he had a shield under his back, and it was glowing faintly green. As he ate some weird thing, it started to recede until it was just him. I ran down the stairs before he turned around.

When he came down, his pupils were enormous and his face was all fidgety. I noticed his features were all shifting around, like a swirling toilet after it’s been flushed. It flickered, and then was normal. “What?” I realized I was staring at him.

“Nothing.”

“I should probably be going now,” I said as we headed towards his house.

“Why? Where are you going to go?”

“I was hoping you could help me with that. What’s the nearest place from here? Rome?”

“Timbuktu.”

“What! But that’s so far away!”

“The Prometheans get around. They’re like a virus. Instead of moving when resources run out, they spread, eventually destroying everything they touch.”

“But why is Timbuktu still there? Why did everything else get destroyed?”

“Lots of other things survived, like the pyramids. Since they built it, it contains a lot of their magic, and that makes things very hard to destroy. So places like the Taj Mahal, the Pyramids and the White House haven’t been touched. Other things have been completely destroyed as a result of an attempt to destroy one of these places like Chernobyl.”

“ So why can’t I go to one of these places?”

“ Because it’s too dangerous. One false move and you die in one of these places.”

“ Well then I’m going. I’ve got to go back to where I came from. I’ve got to go back to my life in Washington D.C. I need my store and my family back.”

“ Well I’m afraid I can’t let you go.”

I should have guessed. I had seen quite a few suspicious things during my time here. His weird back problems, his eye, the weird absence of life in the streets.

“What are you talking about? I can go where I want!”

“ Why do you think you’re still alive? Why do you think you haven’t run away in fear from this place?”

“What are you saying?”

“You would have been dead years ago if it weren’t for those blasted humans who revived you.”

“You mean in the hospital? I was mugged and then carted into the ER.”

“They obviously altered your memory too. Any mortal that comes to this place loses their mind!”

“You’re not saying...”

“You are the Fourth Liberator! Yes! Thank You! And while I was keeping you distracted, my buddies in the cave over there have found a way to kill you. Soul incineration.”

“You’ll never take me alive. If I’m going anywhere, it’s home.”

“Let’s see...”

He reaches behind him, while I run for the house. I’d seen a bow in one of the windows. He fires a few projectiles that look like balls of lightning. Best not get hit by one of those. I easily batter down the door and grab the bow, but I was missing something.

“Arrows!” I curse under my breath. Then I notice a quiver with a few arrows in it. I just manage to duck before an energy ball burns my brain out. I scramble along the floor for the arrows. I tip it out, and only two arrows fall out. They were acid green, with small print that said “WARNING: Twist middle 45 degrees to arm. 30s charge after arming. Industrial strength incineration arrows.”

“Perfect.” But I’ve only got two shots.

“Come out, come out, puny human! I want to play too!”

I make a plan, and I actually went with it. I peeled out the door and fire the first shot wide to the left. Just as I planned. I shoot the second shot just to the right of him. It’s going well. He dodges left towards the first arrow, but it all goes wrong.

“Hah! You’ve forgotten to arm the first arrow! Stupid man! Luckily, the second arrow shuts him up. As it detonates, a wave of neon green plasma energy engulfs him. The last thing I hear of the old man is a cold-hearted screech of rage. And before he could say anything else, he was gone. All that was left was a puddle of goo, which slowly seeped into the ground. I decided that I’d better get home before the rest come out of their cave, wherever home was.

“Next stop, Timbuktu,” I mumble. And then I run off towards the real world.