

“I’m beginning to wonder what this is even good for,” said Greyson as he lay in his cot staring at the ceiling. “It’s all so artificial and simulated! I read in that book once about things called experiences and an odd phrase called “spur of the moment” or something of the like, back in the days when we apparently valued interaction, which is rare now. I know they mean well by it, somehow, but they’re lying to all of us.” Greyson took a series of deep breaths to calm himself and attempted to fall asleep in his cold, dank jail cell. Greyson Nalis is a member of a civilization called Painters. The New Revolution started back around the year 2318 A.D. when every country on earth was involved in a chaotic war. There was a collaborative effort by major scientists of every nation, who called themselves The Council. Little did they know that it would change the entire course of humanity. The Council found a way to eliminate all pain from every day life simply by establishing a method they called ‘Painting’. Painting allows the patient to undergo unconsciousness and enter a virtual realm of sorts where they can experience anything they would like to experience, even to the point where they can see what death feels like, and instantly come back to “reality” and have a memory of that experience. This technology to be able to experience anything you’d like at the drop of a hat was revolutionary. The Council would reveal the project on one condition; all nations must agree to a ceasefire and peace treaty. All nations agreed and the project was revealed and instantly, humanity changed for the better and a utopia was created out of the once war-torn earth; or so they thought. You see, Painting was such revolutionary technology that it soon reached cult status and shortly thereafter, they no longer considered themselves human but instead called themselves Painters. From here on out, the world was run by Painters, not humans. In fact to be considered human was inferior, since humans could not fabricate their future through Painting, so information on the previous tens and hundreds of thousand of years of humanity began to be censored and blacklisted. Painters became either pupils or teachers, and they simply study during every waking moment and aim towards the next biggest technological improvement. Since the Painting process was so profound, they do not mind researching and studying day and night to obtain what they hope to be something bigger and more telling than Painting. Hundreds of years pass between the Painter Revolution and to where we find Greyson; among this utopian world is where the story begins.

One month before the Incident

“Greyson, did you finish your last study checkpoint?” hollered Cole over the hum of the computers in the study complex. “I cannot seem to find that last book on Quantum Energies

applied in Theoretical Schematics and Outcomes! Professor Puppite said it should be under ‘Q’ here in the catalog.” said Greyson as he shoveled through stacks upon stacks of encyclopedias and manuals. “You had better keep looking then!” replied Cole. Cole McZane had been Greyson’s best friend ever since they met back when they first joined the Study Academy, and they made a great team. They always were able to find the most information that the Superiors could use and organize it well and even tested the theories that they had established. The two were revered around the globe for their dedication to the advancement of the world. “I think I’ll try checking ‘T’, maybe it’s under theoretical for some odd reason.” yelled Greyson as he walked down the vast staircase.

The study complex was elaborate. It had over one-thousand study rooms with an immense resource collection ranging from digital, tablet and hologram books all the way to ‘old-school’ hardcopy books. On his right he could see only a handful of the twenty-three food courts spread throughout the numerous square miles of the complex, of which he could smell his favorite restaurant not far away. On his left he stared out a massive one-hundred foot long by twenty foot high crystal clear window which held a beautiful view of the man-made (Painter-made) lake and the mountains surrounding the complex which were just letting a few rays of the setting sun past to reflect off the lake. He could just see the lights of the Capital in the distance where the Superiors stayed and studied. Greyson and his class were in the top ten percent of the world’s population in terms of their study skills and capabilities, so they were sent to the most advanced complex in the world which was right next door. As he stared out the window, he felt a sudden wave of some emotion come over him; he had never felt anything like this before. “Something isn’t right... I think? I don’t know what that feeling is. That is why we have Paintings however, is to feel. I might just be sick I suppose.” As he said this, Cole walked up behind him with a tablet in his hand. “Say, is this it?” he said as he handed Greyson the paper thin, lightweight device. “No, this is the older version of the book we need, it isn’t updated enough,” he said in a monotonic voice, “let’s go ask Professor Puppite. Maybe he’d know of other resources we could use.”

“I’m sorry boys, I can’t seem to find anything of good use on the shelves here,” mumbled the older, graying professor. “Oh well.” Greyson and Cole looked at each other blankly and back at the professor. “So there are no other books here that could explain our topic?” muttered Cole as Greyson looked the professor over. “That’s right, boys.” he replied. Greyson noticed a scrap of

paper on the professor's desk. It seemed to have once been crumpled up and torn, but it appeared to have been smoothed out. On it, he spotted a bit of a word he had never seen or heard before; 'Huma—' was all he could read. "Professor, what is that little sheet of paper there?" questioned Greyson. The professor looked startled. "Oh it's nothing!" he lied. "Then can we see this nothing, sir?" replied Cole as he stared at the paper. "Well, I'm surprised it went on for this long. Boys, this is serious information that I'm about to disclose to you," preached Puppate "and you mustn't tell anyone. This could end us all." "Alright sir, just please explain what that is!" stammered Cole. "I ripped this one page out of one of the thousands of books that were blacklisted. You see boys, hundreds of years ago, we weren't Painters." explained the Professor. "WHAT!?" seethed Greyson. "Where did we come from then sir?" "We used to be known as 'humans' boys," chortled the professor. "Hyoo-mahns? How do you say it?" blurted Cole. Greyson snatched the slip of paper and read it out loud, "Humans." he said as he felt that same feeling he felt while he was staring out the window. "A war broke out hundreds of years ago, and it seemed to have no end. The killing seemed infinite. That was when scientists, one from every nation joined forces under secrecy—" said the professor until Cole interjected. "Wait, what is a nation? You mean we didn't all belong to the homeland?" "That's right," continued the professor. "And no one really seemed to agree. That's why the war broke out. Anyway, the scientists had to discover a way to end the war secretly. They developed a way to cure any and all pain by a process they coined as Painting which I'm sure you guys have participated in. The fighting ceased and the world as we know began to blossom." Greyson looked at the professor and implored him to explain what it was like before the Painter Revolution. "What did we all do before Painting?" The professor looked around his office and answered, "Humans could actually experience things first-hand. They didn't need to go through Painting. They endured pain of both physical and mental constraints, as well as emotional pains like sorrow, heartbreak and so many others." Cole's jaw nearly hit the floor. "You mean they put themselves through all that just to experience something?! How idiotic!" he scoffed. Greyson felt that feeling again. "Why have they been hiding this from us?" he asked. "They knew that the whole concept of actually feeling and participating in interactions versus Painting would be a mess, and could possibly create an uprising or war" replied Puppate, "and I don't expect you boys to tell anyone. This is simply just another sheet of blacklisted information that is no longer relevant." Greyson and Cole looked at each other. "Of course not, professor! I much prefer being a Painter than these so called

‘humans’ you speak of.” replied Cole. Greyson was astounded at Cole’s response? How could he just ignore this whole concept of actually participating and engaging in these things called ‘feelings’? “But sir,” began Greyson, “why must we suppress it? Couldn’t we just let people know what happened?” The professor didn’t answer him; he instead glared at him as he crumpled the paper and threw it at the boy. “If you want to know, take your own risks, but be fore-warned. It is your issue now.” he demanded. “Alright professor; but what are risks? I haven’t heard of those before.” the professor laughed at him with a cold, blank face and chortled, “That’s for you to find out, somehow!”

Greyson immediately began to try and dig up these blacklisted books on his own while Cole continued their study checkpoint. He was surprised at how simple it was to get the blacklisted resources on “humans.” All he had to do was wait until everyone was involved or preoccupied with a citizens Painting and sneak into the vault. Cracking the vault was easy for Greyson since he was one of the brightest pupils in the class, let alone the world. He nabbed a few books and got to studying in their room. When Greyson walked in with an armful of the forbidden materials, Cole gasped. “Are you sure this is a good idea, Greyson? You heard the professor.” Greyson smiled for the first time in his life and said “Positive. Read this; it’s unbelievable!” Greyson opened a book and pointed out how many types of feelings there were, both physical and emotional. They spent hours upon hours reading through the material together. Greyson knew exactly what that feeling he felt when he was looking out the window a few days ago; it was a sense of longing. A sense to be wanted. A want to experience this thing called love. A want to be human; not a Painter. “I know what I need to do, Cole. I need to tell the world about this!” Cole slammed the book shut, and didn’t blink. “Greyson, if you did that the Superiors won’t be happy. They’ll do what I just read about....they’ll kill you! They wouldn’t allow such talk these days! They’ll imprison you!” Greyson simply started collecting more information on the subject quietly, smiling as he did it. “The world needs to know this, and we can be human again,” he kept repeating over and over to himself. Cole sat on his bed and stared at Greyson. “I always knew you were different. I’ll help.” Cole began to laugh and said, “We’re what the humans would call rebels!” Greyson replied, “*We’re* what we’d call rebels.” They both laughed and began to sift through the stacks of books and began to assemble their presentation to present to the world.

“I feel so much more, what’s that one word we just found? Enlightened! Yes, enlightened,” said Greyson as he made the final touches on his script. The two had assembled a book on what the human race was and why they believed they should eliminate Painting. They also made script cards to read to the Superiors, posters, fliers and the whole nine yards. They intended to be seen and heard. “Well, let’s get going then! Today, our complex; tomorrow, the World!” roared Cole as he blew past Greyson on his way towards the door. “Wait for me!” hollered Greyson. The two ran around the complex putting up posters, handing out fliers to other Painters (to whom they said “You are my brother, human! Read this!”) and thus began to create confusion amongst the Painters of the complex. Soon, mass hysteria erupted. It was not long before the Superiors caught wind of the incident that was still occurring and distracting both their pupils and professors alike. “We must end this, my brothers,” screamed the Chief Superior, Malum Terre. “They are heretics!” others roared. Malum lifted his hand to quiet them, and spoke calmly. “I have a good idea, brethren. Let us jail the two juvenile delinquents, and show them a prized human possession that we still own. They say they want to feel and experience things? Well it is simple; let us use a weapon and kill them. They will feel pain, sorrow and experience death and trouble us no longer.” The Superiors all began to applaud Malum’s wonderful idea. “This friends, is what humans used to kill each other with. This is a rifle!” He roared as he lifted the weapon over his head.

Greyson and Cole were arrested and immediately brought before The Superiors in the Capital. “Do you know what you have done, Greyson?” questioned Malum. “Sir, we we’re telling people the truth! We aren’t these so called ‘Painters’! We are humans! You are lying to the world!” yelled Greyson as he sat on a folding metal chair. In front of him was the whole council of Superiors and numerous citizens that had heard what had happened. Cole sat on his left, and he looked incredibly confident. “You’re all liars!” yelled Cole. A gasp circulated throughout the crowd. Malum displayed the boys work and began to rip their novel page by page. “This, my friends, is heresy! Humans died out because we Painters are far superior! We are not humans! That is all.” He ordered the crowd to return to their complex and ordered the boys to be put in separate jail cells. Soon, the Capital building was empty; that is, except for the torn up fliers, posters and books. “I can’t believe they’re doing this to us, Greyson. What do you think they’ll do?” stammered Cole across the hallway. “I think they intend to kill us, you saw how upset they were.” answered Greyson as he wrote something down on a scrap piece of paper he had kept in

his pocket. Cole looked quizzically at him and asked what he was writing about. "I'm writing my last words." Greyson choked. "I have to leave something." The two stared at each other across the hall, and they shared another feeling; sorrow.

The two were woken by a command. They heard their cell doors clang open. "Get up now. Malum wants you." said the guard in a monotonic voice as he blankly glanced from one boy to the next. They both willingly got up and followed the guard back into the Capital building. Immediately as they walked in, they noticed Malum and numerous other guards holding things they had just learned about days before while studying; they were rifles. Cole gasped when he saw them. Greyson clenched his hands into fists and gritted his teeth. He was experiencing another feeling he had read about; rage and disappointment. "Come, have a seat guys," chortled Malum. "I think it's time we silenced you two. You know too much. You're a hindrance to the advancement of our race!" With no way out, the boys walked forward and sat silently in the cold metal chairs. The group sat in silence, each side expecting the other to make a comment. "Well, any last words boys?" retorted Malum as he began to load the rifle. "I have a lot to say, Malum. I'll give you the gist of it, otherwise you'd die from old age before you could kill us." chuckled Greyson. "Hah! Thanks for your consideration, Greyson. Out with it." roared Malum. "Well to start off with, I don't want to have to give a damn about you and your idiotic inhibitions!" Greyson yelled. "I was starting to see the world in a different light, to see the truth, but you're making it darker for the entire world! You shelter everyone and make them believe they can become whatever they want, but that's just it. They can't. It's all in their head; it's intangible. They don't have it in reality. We're simply blank slates waiting for a Painter to interfere. It's quite complex, but what do I know? According to you, I'm just a Canvas." Malum roared with laughter and replied, "You're right! You don't know! Guards, take care of these imbeciles." Two guards walked forward, aimed, and shot. Greyson clenched at his chest and writhed in pain as he fell off the chair, blood spilling on the floor. He turned to look at Cole, and immediately wished he hadn't; he appeared thoroughly dead, immersed in his own blood. Greyson noticed that his vision began to lessen and the pain began to subside. "This is what death is like? It's serene" he thought. He saw a bright light and succumbed to this strange feeling of numbness. "This is death." He thought, as he drifted into the nothingness.

"Captain? Captain! Wake up!" The captain's eyes snapped open. Captain Greyson D'Alene looked around noticing he was hooked up to numerous machines. He noticed the

doctors and nurses running around frantically as he blinked his eyes, trying to focus on the nurse in front of him. "Code white, guys! He's good!" Scientists began to talk about him and mention instruments and discussed that a project called Painting was working. He felt like he had been asleep for years on end. Greyson got up and walked over to one of the doctors who was reading a few instruments and taking notes. "Excuse me, what year is it?" asked Greyson. The doctor began to laugh. "Are you kidding buddy? It's March 6, 2318. You're a Captain in the United States Army who volunteered to undergo an experiment to see if a new revolutionary process called Painting would work. We're doing it in an effort to see if we can stop the world war upon releasing it. So tell me, did it?" Everyone heard them talking, and stared at the two anxiously. Greyson felt queasy. "No. It didn't work." he answered. "What?! What do you mean it didn't work?" screamed the doctor. "I know what would happen," roared Greyson "I saw what it did! The human race would become a senseless, meaningless race that hates interaction and only wants to advance themselves! I experienced it! What is the sense in living if you cannot experience feeling?! To be human, is to feel!" The room was silent, except for the beeping of some of the medical equipment. "Destroy it; all of it. You will all regret it if you don't." No one in the room moved. "Did you hear me? Move! Now!" The room erupted into chaos as technicians smashed instrumentation, machines and tools while others burned manuals and lab notes. Greyson walked out to his quarters. The whole time he walked, he couldn't believe that they once thought this Painting process was a good idea. "I'm glad it's over." he thought. As he walked, he valued the simple feelings of relief, satisfaction and hunger. A phrase kept running through his head the whole time he walked towards his quarters; "I'm just a canvas."