

*The Series of*

*Dystopian*

*Events*



English VHAP Term 2 2023

# The Series of Dystopian Events

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## Introduction

Inside this wonderful book are the amazing short stories of year 7 participants in the VHAP program. The VHAP program is for high-scoring students in NAPLAN. In the English VHAP course students study a book from a genre and then write their own short stories. You will find many texts about all the different dystopias made by these specific students. A dystopia is an imagined scenario of what society might look like where there is great suffering and injustice. There are different forms of texts that some students did such as diaries, news reports etc. This book was published to read through these engaging stories for your pleasure!

# Behind the Screens by Ayden

In a world where humans no longer ventured beyond their homes, the once bustling streets stood eerily empty, devoid of life. The air outside, once filled with the sounds of laughter and conversation, had become stagnant, only occasionally disturbed by the wind whispering through abandoned buildings.

It all began when the virtual realm took hold of society. Virtual reality technology had advanced to the point where people could experience vivid and immersive worlds from the comfort of their own homes. With the ability to create any environment and interact with others in the digital realm, the allure of the outside world began to fade.

People gradually retreated into their homes, disconnecting from physical reality in favour of the endless possibilities offered by the virtual realm. Social gatherings transformed into virtual hangouts, and physical activity was replaced by virtual sports and adventures.

Years passed, and the world outside became a mere memory. The once vibrant parks were now overgrown, and the streets were reclaimed by nature. The only signs of human life were the flickering lights in windows, where people sat engrossed in their digital lives.

One day, however, a young girl named Lily stumbled upon an old book hidden in her family's attic. The book contained stories and photographs of a time when humans freely roamed the outside world, basking in the warmth of the sun and revelling in the beauty of nature. Lily's curiosity was piqued, and she longed to experience what the world outside had to offer.

Armed with determination and a sense of adventure, Lily embarked on a journey to rediscover the outside world. She navigated the decaying streets, pushing aside vines and plants that had entwined themselves around buildings. She marvelled at the vastness of the sky, feeling the warmth of the sun on her skin for the first time.

As she explored, she encountered remnants of the past. Faded signs and forgotten landmarks told stories of a thriving society that had vanished. Lily's heart ached for what had been lost, but it also swelled with hope for what could be regained.

Word of Lily's journey spread, and slowly, others began to venture outside as well. Inspired by her bravery, people yearned to experience the world beyond the digital confines of their homes. The virtual realm, once a source of comfort and escape, started to lose its appeal.

Communities began to form, and people rediscovered the joy of face-to-face interactions. Laughter echoed through the streets as conversations filled the air. The parks were once again alive with the sounds of children playing and families picnicking.

However, there was a chilling truth that awaited them. As the humans began to frequent the outside world, they unknowingly disturbed a slumbering force—a dormant entity that had been lurking in the depths of the neglected wilderness.

Slowly, this force awakens, seeping into the hearts and minds of those who dared to venture outside. The once-peaceful world turned into a nightmare of paranoia and terror. Shadows whispered menacingly, and eerie apparitions materialised in the corners of their vision.

The humans found themselves trapped between the claustrophobic comfort of their homes and the relentless terror that awaited them outside. They realised too late that their neglect of the physical world had allowed something malevolent to fester, waiting for an opportunity to strike.

The cold twist in their newfound freedom left them yearning for the safety of their virtual lives. But the entity that had been awakened knew no boundaries, infiltrating the virtual realm itself. The lines between reality and the digital world blurred, as the chilling presence reached out to claim the souls of those who had forsaken the outside world.

In the end, the humans found themselves prisoners of their own making—trapped inside their homes, haunted by the entity they had unwittingly unleashed. The world that was once their sanctuary had become their eternal prison, a cold and desolate place where they could never truly escape the horrors that lurked just beyond their screens.

And so, as the remnants of humanity huddled in fear, they were left to ponder the consequences of their abandonment of the outside world—a lesson learned too late, as the cold grip of their virtual reality turned into a nightmare from which they could never awaken.

# A Depreciating Reality By Leo Al Ali

## BREAKING NEWS

A reality of simply brutal, pushy life is ahead of you. If you ever try to escape the norm you will be looked at if you are crazy. If you try to escape the reality that was built by the founders of modern technology and agenda pushing you will be known as a crazy guy. IF you can even escape there is a full reality for you to explore. Not the digital media but the natural forest and jungle that has been untouched.

PLEASE HELP THEY ARE ATTACKING ME. I DON'T WANT TO BE IN THE LOOP.  
KEEP IN TOUCH.

## Smile...or You Die by Wahaj Azhar

In Unga Bunga the only emotion you can show is happiness and the only facial expression you can do is smile, but why? What happened to this world and why is it so dystopian? The truth and answer are that a seemingly harmless experiment to create a prototype of robots to do your household work failed, but the failed experiment broke free and built clones until they became widespread. They were designed to keep everyone relaxed and happy but an error in the program caused them to annihilate anyone that showed another emotion that was not happiness. Many superpowers joined to stop them but all failed. In a year they had taken over and halved the population of that world. Among the survivors there was a brave man, Nuer, who decided to take initiative and started a rebellion while pretending to be happy.

The scientist, Rraur, who started to build the prototype named it Kiir, after the noise it made when vacuuming and turning on and off. It was harmless and worked well but Rraur decided to give it finishing touch before he sold it to many major businesses. He decided to install ChatGPT on it so it could learn human behaviour and could talk and comfort humans, but a minor error changed how it acted completely. What happened next completely changed the course of humanity...

Nuer, a friend of Rraur, was the first to notice changes in his town. Day by day, the town became quieter, the traffic lessened on the roads and the birds stopped chirping. He knew something subtle was occurring that was killing the town but still felt indifferent about it.

He thought, "It must be me imagining this town is less noisy. It is still early morning and people are probably sleeping. It could not be something more sinister as there have been no reports of anything troubling and I have not lost anyone that I know."

Yet as he thought that he couldn't help but something clearly was happening at the back of his mind. As the warm beams of light illuminated the modest town and it was around morning only a few cars were on the road at peak hour. Now Nuer felt concerned. The town was not usually this empty. Something was happening. He needed some consolidation about what was going on so he ran to Rraur's house.

A strong and musty smell of motor oil hit him as soon as he stepped foot in Rraur's house. As he approached the locked wooden door to his lab, which Nuer knew he would be working at, noticed it was wide open and shattered glass was everywhere on the metal floor. As he analysed his surroundings, Nuer found some sort of blueprint. They looked like they belonged to the new prototype that was Rraur's pride. As Nuer was about to leave, he noticed a new, rotting sort of smell. Nuer felt like it came from the crates full of robot parts. As he peered into one of them, he saw it. It was mangled and brutally mutilated. He tried not to get sick over it.

It also had a note attached to it. "He wasn't happy. Look at what happened to him."

Nuer ran home in shock and fear of what he had seen. As the days passed by, he would regularly turn on his television to see more distressing news about them and how miserably the world was failing to stop them. He would then just turn it off, not wanting to hear more of it.

“Why have the robots left me and taken others? Am I the last one alive? How am I supposed to feel safe when a wall is between me and death, and my life hangs on a thread? Do I have a responsibility to save this crumbling world if I am still a survivor?” Nuer thought about these unanswered questions while he tried to sleep. The answer to all those was a maybe. “It had been a year since they finally took over. To think they started from one failed robot.” Nuer thought.

Everywhere was chaos. People fought for food and water now. The rich were poor, and the poor were dead. It was everyone for themselves.

Everywhere it was written “He wasn’t happy. Look at what happened to him.”

It was impossible for Nuer to go and just be happy when the population of his planet was halved, and he was the only surviving member of his family and that was without mentioning he had been starving for days at a time. The robots were indifferent about the condition of the world. All they had had to see was one tear, one frown and hear one word of complaint to send him off to their prisons. He heard stories from those who had not been brainwashed or killed about what happened inside of them. As he listened to them, he had to smile, or he would be the next to experience them in person. He suppressed his shudders at the retold memories of the survivors being starved, whipped, and having moulds put into their mouths to keep them smiling permanently or worse. Everyone was rangy and pale. Nuer hoped his end would come peacefully and soon. But not before he liberated the world of the heartless robots.

Nuer had scavenged all he could to kickstart his new movement. He hunted down materials to transform his home into a fortress. He had gathered people to form his army. It was only the remainder of the town, which was around 50, but it was a start. He had a feeling in heart he would soon save the world. He didn’t know how one day these robots would be gone, banished from existence and a dream only the most creative could imagine.

# *A Game of Life or Death* by Olivia Chan

## **ARTICLE #1 [published 01/01/4310]**

A young teen murders hundreds for amusement. But how did a simple new game concept plunge into dark waters? An exclusive interview from the professor themselves.

“On December 23, a well-known scientist, I, Professor Casey McRowen,” Prof. McRowen grinned. “On a misty, cloudy day, crouched down to switch the luminescent fairy-lights on, when abruptly an idea flooded my thoughts.” He stated with pride, “While I visited my five bright, innocent nieces and nephews, I noticed the same video games I usually do, memories of laughter and joyous screams filling the house, all of them focused on obtaining the winning prize: a bag of candy or something simple they desired. But instead, an unsettling, dismal mood drifted throughout the atmosphere. Why weren’t they playing? I hesitated for a second, not one of them were even simply touching technology, or even next to it, slouched onto the sofa. This was unacceptable. What on Earth were they supposed to do? Grab a book and read outside in the sun? Absolutely not. Earning 10 minutes of sunlight and breathing in the grassy-nature smells can be fatal. I soon plunged deeper into the situation, or rather onto the illuminated hovering sofas. Warily, they declared all video games were ‘boring’ and repetitive.” He paused, sighing deeply.

“So, I was determined, determined to find a solution to eradicate all boredom for children. After a few days of sleepless nights and sleep deprived mornings, I had finally done it. A minuscule chip, with infinite wires hidden inside, once transplanted into a person’s head - in my case, I was lucky enough to use prisoners - or even an animal, could be controlled. Quite easily too, by the comfort of your couch. By the comforting grip of the hexagonal controller. It would be groundbreaking, top the gaming charts....” McRowen stammered.

“Vast amounts of people quickly saw it, but very few signed up to play. Then, an anonymous message, the sky was a murky black. My heart skipped a beat, someone wanted to buy my game. I didn’t think, in a second, in a flash, I sold my game. No thoughts. I didn’t know what would come of my creation.”

Professor Casey, McRowen, 27<sup>th</sup> day of December, 4309, 12:30pm.

## **ARTICLE #2 [published 03/01/4310]**

### **BREAKING NEWS: YOUNG TEEN ARRESTED FOR HOMICIDE**

A young teen has been arrested by multiple police teams and has gone on trial for manslaughter, additionally running an illegal underground “video game” scheme for more than 2 months. Today, the teen was executed, as a punishment for the unlawful crimes committed. As a young teenager, the victim

was allowed to write a letter to their parents prior to the execution. The letter will soon be published publicly and is down below. What is written is truly heart breaking and remorseful. Such a young life, wasted to crime.

--

Dear Mom and Dad,

30/12/4309

It was me. I did it. And now I'm about to be murdered, just like the hundreds of people I killed.

I bought the game off Prof. McRowen, the first time I played it... it hooked me. Until it became repetitive, but I got good at the game. I just need someone to play with me, not half of the country. I rented an underground stadium. Then, no one would know. I only invited a few friends, a few people I knew wouldn't snitch on me. We played for nights and days, days, and nights. Only soon, people flooded the stands, and it made me feel... almost excited, proud of myself. Strangers, pierced, tall, fat, spotty; they all begged to play. None of them could beat me. I was victorious. People became angrier, infuriated. One day... The day I regret everything, if I could take anything back it would be this day, I was playing, my prisoner was young, beautiful. The other player was ill-tempered, he was quite good too. But I was soon to beat him, it was inevitable. Things soon got out of hand, more screaming, more yelling. My head was in the clouds, wasn't focusing right, pressed the wrong button. Just like that. In a few seconds, my prisoner had her hands around the other's neck. The next thing I knew, we switched off the chip, they didn't move, didn't breathe. Dead. But it didn't stop there. Weeks and weeks, it became more enticing, more desirable. Dead bodies lying on the floor, printed on my eyelids when I tried to sleep. More appealing, more thrilling. Promptly, it wasn't 'just a video game', but something I did with no thought, like my hands had a mind of its own, you know. I couldn't stop, wouldn't. Never felt anything those days. One morning, the weight of guilt slammed down on me, as I walked into the empty stadium. Crimson splotches everywhere... Empty bottles of liquor. I couldn't take it anymore. I wanted it all to end. Planned to shut down everything. Cancel everyone. Smash the game.

Then the goddamn police show up.

Just like a prisoner, my brain was blurred... Couldn't even let a kid like me see their parents. Shame. It'll be alright, though. Just like everyone else, I'll be dead soon. Sent off to hell, or wherever.

See you there.

# When The World Runs Dry by Rosie Chong

(Unfinished)

*Twenty Years Ago*

The crowd was waiting. No-one knew what for. They only knew that they had to come. Nervous murmurings and rumours spread like wildfire. All of them were wearing their oxygen masks and hacking and coughing pierced the low voices from those who didn't. Every now and then someone would collapse, but no-one gave them their attention. Then silence fell as heavily as a spotlight glowed on stage.

Everyone clapped as the Prime Minister stepped into the light.

"Welcome," he started, scanning the crowd. "For a long time, we have been fighting the pollution caused by our ancestors. I fear the problem has become too great for us to bear. Most of the world has reached their Day Zero, and we will be next if we don't act."

Worried glances were cast around the crowd.

"However, I knew this burden would one day fall upon us, which is why I have asked our best technologists, scientists, and everything in between to create something for us. Something that will change everyone's lives forever." The crowd held their breath, waiting in anticipation.

"Now, I present to you, Project H<sub>2</sub>O!"

## Chapter One

Kai was only two when his mother died. He had seen her go weeks with only half a cup of water each day, until she finally couldn't take it anymore. She had collapsed right in front of Kai, and the men in the black suits instantly came. People called them The Takers. His father had raised him since then. That day was the first day Kai saw the effects of Project H<sub>2</sub>O, but it wasn't the last. All the Lower Class slowly ran out of water, and it wasn't uncommon to see the bodies of people sprawled out on the streets. Now, at fifteen years old, he was able to find out his ranking. His father's words rang in his head.

"Remember," he had said, "Your ranking determines the amount of water you get per day. Please, be careful and do everything you're told to, okay?"

Kai nodded along with his words, remembering what had happened to his mother. With those words in mind, he stepped into the Ranking Hall. The space was huge, big enough to fit the many teenagers and still have room for a stage and maybe 50 more guests. A crystal chandelier shaped like a water droplet hung from the roof and tear-shaped pearls were embedded into the walls. Silks and velvet covered most of the room, all in a supposedly welcoming deep red colour. To Kai, it looked ominous, the colour of his mother's blood. Tiny pinpricks of water welled in his eyes, but he quickly blinked them away. Now was not the time. Suddenly, a loud squeal echoed through the room and a voice bounced through the hall from the stage.

“Attention contestants,” a man on the stage said. His tone seemed too bright for a topic like this.

“Welcome to your Ranking Test. As many of you *should* know, your ranking determines your water supply. By the end of this test, some of you will be able to live as lavishly as us,” he gestured around the room, “And some of you will live like *them*,” he wrinkled his perfect nose and pointed outside, where there were a few beggars on the street. Then, he put a more serious face on, or as serious as his stupid, happy face could be.

“As you also should know, a human can live without water for only three days. Therefore, it is clear many of you will die if you don’t succeed in this test.” This news wasn’t new, many family members had died before.

“If you wish to die beforehand if it happens that you fail the test, please find me on the stage and an execution will be prepared,” he finished, with a hint of a smirk.

A spark of rage kindled inside of Kai. It seemed like the man *wanted* people to die. Maybe he did. Maybe even if everyone passed the test, someone would still die. Kai shook his head to clear those absurd thoughts. *Nothing is going to happen. Nothing is going to happen. NOTHING IS GOING TO HAPPEN.* A few Takers escorted all the contestants out of the hall, into a side room. By the time they reached their destination, Kai had almost convinced himself that everything was okay. Almost.

“Everyone, get in line,” one of the takers said, by the sounds of it, an older man. Kai tried to imagine who was behind the mask. As a face began to form in his head, something hit his back. Pain ricocheted throughout his spine, and he turned around to see a Taker looming over him.

“Did you hear what I said?” the person snarled, and a jolt of surprise coursed through him when he heard the voice. It sounded like a young girl. A child. But that couldn’t be right.

“Or are you too busy thinking up here?” the maybe-young-girl taunted, thwacking his skull. Pain blossomed in his head, feeding his anger. He wanted to snap back at her, but he remembered his father. Would he want Kai to do this? Or would he be disappointed. *Disappointed probably*, Kai thought bitterly. *Like he always was.* It was unfair to think of his father like that. Kai knew that he tried hard to take care of Kai, but sometimes, his calm façade cracked, and it was like reading a book. Everything was written all over his face and in those moments, Kai could see his father hated his attitude and roughness that was sometimes shown and was still grieving about Kai’s mother. Kai used to be able to sympathise with him, but it had been 13 years. Now, the word that came to mind was *weak*.

“If I must repeat,” the Taker said, raising her voice to shout the last part, “GET INTO ALPHABETICAL ORDER FOR GOD’S SAKE!” Feet scurried around until everyone was in their place.

## *Flaw* by Joshua Chow

Feeling the afternoon sun beat down on me, I sighed, relishing the end of the school day. The shorter high-rise buildings mocked my height, yet I liked strolling home alone. I know I'm reportedly an extrovert, but it's something about the still, shining lake and the tall olive trees that makes this place, my place.

But I knew this quietude wouldn't last long. Between school, homework and sport, I had barely any time to myself, especially with The Division happening next week. School, especially school, felt the toughest now. I'd probably be dead by now if it weren't for Damien and his answers. Damien, Mum's favourite twin.

Massive glass billboards spanning across the corner of buildings scream in my face. The Division. The Division. The Division. Every turn, every street, every place, they'd be a billboard. Where "young people find their place in society" and "become adults". At the age of 15, all citizens must complete The Division. But no one says what exactly happens there. Is it a test, an exam, what is it? The only thing we knew about it was Perfection. That's the only goal. Be the best you humanly can be, or you're a loose end. An outlier. A flaw.

The still lake, a peachy-orange colour, glittered like a million tiny diamonds in the afternoon Sun. A small yellow duck glides across the water's surface sending ripples throughout. I barely turned around before a pelican scooped up the duck. But I didn't think too much of it.

"Hey Dylan,"

I turn, startled, but quickly meet almond-brown eyes.

"Could you do me a favour?"

I have homework and training, but a little break won't hurt, right?

"Bet," I reply.

\*

The hallways were a labyrinth, silver with a chilling white light at every corner. Sleek, clean and remorseless.

My whole body screamed in pain, beaten, bruised; being dragged by the arm. Clad in sleek white armour that covered every inch of their bodies, apart from the head; the two male soldiers had an iron grip. Every time I pushed, their arms would constrict—so flawless, so perfect - almost machine like. I glanced at their faces, staring straight forward, remorseless. Yet there was a ghost of a flinch on their faces when someone screamed, as the screams were a reminder of something inevitable, some inescapable fate...

I met the cold, metal floor hard - body wrapped in screaming anguish. My cell was as clean and monotonous as everything else, large as a quarter of a public bathroom. With my head throbbing, breath raspy; what happened?

There was a wall - bleak, empty - hidden place.

Colour, paint, can. He loved art - he asked me to keep watch. He was, he was - Jeremy.

Jeremy. What did they do to him?

I screamed and yelled, at the prospect that Jeremy was in danger.

Guards, surrounded us, no chance - no escape

Needles - Jeremy's back - blue fluid - veins and lips turn black - chest and shoulders tensed - eyes wide open and red - passed out.

Black - everything went black.

Then?

Here.

Mind occupied piecing everything together, I didn't notice being yet again hauled by another two guards - two different guards.

At this point, my body gave up. My will crumbled knowing there would be no escape. I just had to accept my fate, whatever it would be. A shrill noise cut my depressing monologue. A scream - oddly familiar.

Jeremy.

Needles - blue fluid, what were they doing to them.

The screaming continued, until it met a halt, an eerie quiet, a silent foreboding sense of peril.

What did that mean?

Tortured to the point of unconsciousness?

More of that blue fluid?

Death?

Warm tears streaked down my bruised cheek, warm yet sickly. He was such a nice kid, I considered him to be my real brother, someone I actually could talk to, someone who wouldn't hog the spotlight like Damien; and it's my fault. If I just said no, we wouldn't - he wouldn't be here. My guilt was a massive stone, one I would have to push up a steep cliff.

Metallic cold met my skin again, sapping my warmth. Guards, with their iron strength, push me into a lying position. It was only then I realised my entire body (except for my head and arms) was covered in a skintight, thin white almost spandex-like material - a tight futuristic onesie with vertical grey lines.

Doctors, no - scientists clad in white suits were talking to one another, holding tablets with various information displayed.

"One in a trillion,"

"Tumour in the perfect spot,"

"Last sightings of these were during mediaeval times, three thousand years ago,"

“We have to take this oppur - “

Then they all went silent, as a taller scientist with black but greying hair strode in - obviously a head scientist of sorts. I tried to listen, but my head throbbed like a thousand grenades in my head.

“So, you said the conditions were perfect for - brain - “

“Yes sir”

“Brain typ -”

“Type -”

“Tum - r?”

“In the - and spreading”

“Truly - fect -”

“Yes sir”

“He will be the first of his kind”

Kind? He? - Me?

Then my heart skipped a beat after what he said next.

“*Correct* him. Commence brain conditioning - 100% compliance,”

# Trapped by Anna Drew

Interviewer: Kate, thank you so much for coming onto the show today. You have a very troubling matter you would like to talk to all the viewers about.

**Kate Pitt:** Your welcome, thanks so much for having me! We need to protect the women we have left in our society! As women aren't allowed to talk until they turn 19 we have noticed a very sudden drop of girls from the ages 14 to 18. The only reason I could suggest that the drop off happens at these ages is all due to growing into young adults and the pressure that comes with becoming young women, all while not being able to talk which can be a lot to handle for a young girl. Another thing that can make women feel lonely and isolated during this process is the fact that men can speak, which provides a sense of injustice into young girl's minds!

**Interviewer:** Allison, you have been very passionate about this matter, as you yourself have gone through this. What were the negative impacts this rule had on your life?

**Kate Pitt:** The negative impacts this rule had on my life included feeling isolated and like I was the only person that was going through this time. I felt as if I couldn't ever break through, and that was the point that made me feel as if I just wanted to vent and disappear. It makes so many thoughts go through your head. Am I enough? What is my purpose in this world? Should I even be here?

## *The Domes* by Elanor Gould

Nothing shined through their window as they groggily opened their eyes that morning or the day before that, the only light that spread throughout the city was the warm brightness of a lamp or the burning beauty of a fire. Hushed whispers of the people below the building buzzed in everyone's ears like the steady hum of an insect's wing. They slowly stood from the old dusty mattress and rubbed their eyes before staring through the cracked glass of the room, the walls outside surrounding them.

Suddenly in the silence of the shack a voice rang out "Hey Kate, are you awake?" "I just woke up," Kate replied dully. She dragged her feet across the wooden floorboards and down the creaky staircase to the bottom floor and looked down at the person cooking something with concentration in front of her. His short, curly brown hair and rounded hazel eyes matched her exactly, as the steps below her creaked he looked up and grinned widely. "Guess what I found for breakfast today?" The young boy asked with excitement. "It better not be those weird moths again Caleb, you were mumbling at the wall for hours after you ate those" The girl joked. "Of course not, do you really think I'm that dumb, I found mushrooms growing in those-" A knock on the rickety door interrupted the conversation between the two, "I'll get it" Kate said as she walked towards the door.

The doorknob squeaked as she twisted it to reveal an elderly man, "Is your brother home?" he croaked out in an old voice. "He's in the kitchen cooking right now, do you need him for something?" "I need help to move some crates into my house and your brother is a nice strong lad, will you please ask him for me?" "Caleb the old man wants some help moving boxes". Caleb swiftly extinguished the flames and ran to the door "You shouldn't call Mr Alfred that, it's rude!" Caleb scolded. Lights on the street bounced off Caleb's and Alfred's clothes while Kate watched them walk across the street and around a corner but as the door began to squeak close something caught her attention.

A flicker of grey fur raced across the road accompanied with the pitter patter of paws on the concrete in front of her. Her eyes narrowed as she jumped after the small rodent, her bare feet thudding against the street as she dived into the dust and landed with a grunt.

## *A Record* by Shi-Han Huang

My dormitory was filled with books on one side, the other plants. The area in the middle was a mess between 11 and 2, a place to chill in the other hours. And it still is. I recall reading about a phrase called 'some things never change' in the library that we have. I guess it fits here. I mean, stuff like that wouldn't change, not with Castor or Kalliope around. Or the fact that our community was pendulous. Well, not exactly. Most of our buildings are in fact attached to trees, 20 metres above the ground according to *The Book of Rules*. And no one wants to test that out. Imagine being stuck in thick mist, 20 metres below your dormitory and experiencing the agonising feeling of destroying all your bones and not being able to hear or see anything. No thanks.

Anyways, we had a massive library in the centre of our society, in the oldest tree. Our library was also the most important place in our world, it held 'The Book of Rules', a leather bound book with millions of pages, rules and ways we should act for every scenario of our lives. We had separate dorms, each with our friends. I had Castor and Kalliope.

Was that good? Did you feel like something BIG happened in the very recent past? (For your information, nothing did. Haha.)

This record is for our community library, written by Solace, about an interesting event that happened with the people she met. I think that suffices. Let's officially start!

I am an introvert, according to Castor, who may or may not be credible. But I still meet quite a lot of people in our society. And sometimes the people I meet are so weird that others tend to avoid them. Or, in this case literally spread rumours about them so that no one would ever want to meet him. Most of our people say that he is mad and, if we used the language in the books of our library 'in need of a psychologist', which I assume means 'in need of someone to help with their mental issues', he is certainly not someone a person in their right minds would want to meet. For example, Mr Jones raves about how we are all cheating death and that no one in our community is even meant to be alive.. 'The Book of Rules' does not have a way to deal with these sorts of people, even though it definitely should, and so we are left pondering how to take care of Mr Jones. Coming to think of it, we are a decision-lacking bunch.

We cannot think of what to do, if not for all the teachings our book gives us.

Perhaps we are fools.

Cough, I didn't write that so don't prosecute me, cough.

Anyways, I somehow got to know about Mr Jones and took caring for him as my responsibility, much to the disappointment of my friends.

Mr Jones had once asked me if I had ever seen the sky blue like the colour of nemophila flowers. To which I replied no, and it was truthful as our skies were forever coated in varying shades of grey. Mr Jones only laughed as if I said one of Castor's jokes. I remember my cheeks burning as I was left there feeling extremely awkward. He caught himself and sometime between his laughing fit said, 'Of course you have seen a blue sky. You may have even seen where the ocean meets the sky.'

Ocean, a word for an endless body of water, smaller than a lake, far bigger than our water catchment roofs on a rainy day. And far deeper too. Mr Jones said that there were many more shades of blue other than the colours of irises, cornflowers and nemophila. I can infer that we either lived in another world or were dead. Mr Jones would certainly vote for the 'we were dead but somehow revived' side.

This brings me to my point. What if Mr Jones was right? He doesn't seem so crazy. At least not to the point of not moving around, just sitting there and all of a sudden yelling at random people. You know, normal psycho stuff.

# Cybernetic Meltdown by Oscar Kuiper

SOME YEARS AGO:

“OH \$#!^!!” screamed Jonathan.

“I KNOW, YOU DON’T HAVE TO TELL ME TWICE”

You’re probably wondering what’s happening and how I got to this point. To get those answers you’re going to need to wait a bit because we’re going to start from the beginning.

Then the newborn began screaming going: “WAAAA, WAAAA”.

Oops, wrong beginning... Oh. Here we are. So, there I was, lazing in the car on the way to school when suddenly, I heard honking and screaming consisting of agony and terror. I looked up from my tablet and to my mother, where she looked back. We both peeked out of our respective windows and saw nothing but corpses, ash and the writhing bodies of the injured. I took to the car door as soon as I understood my surroundings and the situation. It was jammed. I started trying to kick out the door to no avail. Panicking, I started squirming and attempting to find an exit to the battered vehicle. After searching for another 20 seconds, I noticed that the boot was slightly dented so I checked all of the seams and saw that it was open ajar. “MUM! I WE CAN GET OUT FROM THE BOOT.” I forced the boot open and climbed out. My mother attempted to follow behind, but she got grabbed by something enshrouded in soot and ash.

”MUM! NOO”

“KEEP RUNNING!” she screamed while being dragged away. As I ran, I constantly looked back in utter despair trying to see even the slightest trace of my mother while screaming for her to come back. At the point where I was about 100 metres away, I stopped to catch my breath and get a proper look. After looking down and panting for about 5 seconds I turned around and saw a silhouette through the dust. I was terrified. I could have known what it was from a kilometre away. At the time I didn’t know much about them, but I watched a lot of live TV, so I heard a fair bit about cybernetic implants and what they could do and in one of those programmes I saw that exact same figure.

I took off as fast as I could with the rest of the crowd, knowing that only the worst could come from this. A few seconds later, I heard the faintest, most agonizing and blood curdling screams known to mankind. Or at least what was left of mankind when humanity was introduced to Cyberware. Cyberware tapped into the nervous system and allowed the body to do things that didn’t seem possible in anyone’s wildest dreams only a decade prior. Although, suddenly a few years back, the technology used in all Cyberware went haywire and drove all those possessing it into a rampage unstoppable by a normal person. Luckily, the police were able to stop the majority of the rampant tyrants in about 2 years but all those that remained managed to seize control over the implanted cybernetics and went into hiding. At that point in time there was usually only one attack every few weeks and even so, there was barely

anything to worry about because the police got it under control in about an hour. But enough of the backstory. This attack felt different. Larger scale. Normally if something like this happened it would be in some place like a bank but for some unknown reason the unseeable offenders decided to attack a bridge. As I wondered why the bridge would have been attacked my mind kept tracking back to my mother and what sort of fate she would meet.

I kept muttering to myself to focus on running away because my mother would hate it even more if I died trying to save her rather than staying alive and saving the memory of her.

I sprinted to the nearest safety shelter where I met another boy who had also lost his parents in the incident that happened on the bridge. We started talking and he introduced himself as Jonathan. Not even a week sooner, we started talking to each other like we'd been friends for years before then. It felt great knowing that there was someone that had the same troubles as me because I knew that they would understand my sorrows and hardships. We started living at friends' houses because we couldn't manage our parents' properties ourselves. I soon turned 15 and found a job so that I could provide for us as much as our friends offered to. A few months later Jonathan turned 15 as well. We soon started going to do things together like going to the movies (no this is not a romantic scene and no we weren't dating or anything). One of those times while we were walking home, we heard something weird coming from a concealed alleyway. It sounded like whispering but we weren't very sure, so Jonathan, a friend we were with at the time, and I went to investigate. We edged our way down the alley to a garbage bin and hid behind it knowing fully well what would happen if we were found.

We all stayed as silent as possible to find out what the individuals were talking about. They kept talking about some sort of outlandish secret organisation and what caused the outrage of the Cyberware, or something and we thought that it was all some kind of stupid joke, but we decided to go to the address that they were talking about anyways just to see what the "organisation" was. It took us to some run-down villa. I will admit, it looked like a crack house but that didn't stop us from risking getting tetanus. We entered the building. We thought it was really odd how silent it was for an organisation meeting until we heard all sorts of noises coming from down the stairs. Yelling, laughing, crying, the whole lot. We crept down the steps into a crowded room full of people with different types of cybernetic implants and body shapes. It was torture, seeing Cyberware again the only thing that my mind could think of was that fateful morning. I looked at Jonathan, and he had the exact same expression as I did. Sorrow.

We made our way across the room to a boxing ring with 2 fighters in it. One of them built like a freight train and the other built like an insect that just got sprayed with bug killer. The referee counted down. 3... 2... 1... FIGHT and then it was over. In an instant. I don't think that anyone saw what happened, but the bigger guy just fell backwards unconscious all of a sudden. Our little band then walked to another corner of the room full of food and drinks. After a few minutes of waiting, we decided to leave and tell the police. We started walking out but we suddenly got stopped in our tracks. "What kind of Cyberware do you young'uns have?" asked the man

“Uhm, I don’t really know what it’s called because I got it ages ago” I answered

“Oh ok show it to me and take a look for ya”.

“Oh no its quite alright”

“No can do. Organisation rules. If someone asks to see what you got installed, you gotta show ‘em. For security reasons”.

At that point we started backing away slowly getting ready to bolt out at the speed of light. “Well?”

“Uhhh we gotta go...”

“HEY EVERYONE, I RECKON WE’VE GOT US SOME RUNNERS.”

As soon as the first syllable came out of his mouth, we took off running and those that couldn’t keep up with us took guns off of racks and began taking aim. We tried running into an alley, but our friend got shot. “ARGHHH \$#!^, FORGET ME, KEEP RUNNING”

“OH \$#!^!” screamed Jonathan.

“I KNOW, YOU DONT HAVE TO TELL ME TWICE, JUST KEEP RUNNING”

Whilst running I started to devise a plan to end this once and for all. “GET TO THE CYNET ENTERPRISES HEADQUARTERS AND DESTROY THE CYBERWARE SUPERCOMPUTER, IT’S THE ONLY HOPE TO STOPPING THIS”

We turned down street after street with nothing but our final goal in mind. Nothing was stopping us from ending this onslaught. After what felt like hours of running, we finally made it. Jonathan and I were prepared to make the entire building crumble if it meant that we could get to that supercomputer and even if there was an army of guards, defeat wasn’t an option. We soldiered through the complex still exhausted from all the running. Finally, we reached the computer. “Jonathan, can you disable the security while I look for something to destroy this thing with?”

“Yeah sure, I’ve got you”.

“Thanks”

“10%,”

“20%,”

“25%,”

“30%,”

“40%,”

“50%,”

“60%,”

“70%,”

“75%,”

“80%,”

“90%,”

“99%,”

“100%! HURRY THE SYSTEMS ARE ONLY GONNA BE DOWN FOR A LITTLE BIT LONGER”

“I HEAR YOU,” I said while lifting a baseball bat over my head “3...2...1...0...” CRASH.

“Great job, but we have to get going.” said Jonathan over the blaring sirens.

“Yeah, and we’ve gotta dodge those guys now. Even if they don’t have their Cyberware they still gonna be a pain in the @\$ to deal with”

“We’re just going to need to run faster then.”

“Lets go” I said as I propelled myself towards the staircase. We ended up having to fight a few people on the way down but since they had gotten so used to their Cyberware, they forgot how to fight normally (stupid, I know). After fighting through a horde of enemies, we eventually got out of the building and darted to the nearest police station to report what had taken place that night. We talked to the police about what happened and where it happened and they told us that we shouldn’t have done that because it broke almost every law in the book but that we did the right thing.

2 YEARS LATER:

There were still cases of people with cybernetics going psychotic but instead being every few weeks its every few months. So in other words, what Jonathan and I did on that fateful night was the right thing but we had to bear the weight of a friend’s death and had to be the bearer of bad news when telling the parents. But for our entire city, it was a net positive. It also felt incredible for both Jonathan and I to put those monstrosities in a jail cell.

PRESENT DAY:

Crime by cybernetics has been decreased to a near 0 with an average of 1.5 attacks per year and of which, 98% have been small scale with no casualties and only 0.5% had casualties. Nowadays, everyone moves on in life whilst trying to pay as little attention to the past and continuing to dream of the future.

# Drought Image by Shirley Lei

This is an image of a world suffering from drought. The man on the right is the only person left in this world, and he is looking for another living being while remembering how the world used to be, which is depicted on the left.



## *Wish* by Edmunda Lim

The world was forged long ago

Split into two by mankind so

Two different but still parallel

But when they fought it went to hell

*We're better, the stronger half*

*Not true but sure gave me a laugh*

*Your only place is doing kitchen work*

*Ludicrous is what I hear we want the right to do real work*

Soon one half forged a plan

We'll make a world where no man will stand

But will it really be oh so grand?

The ones who wished the men away

Stood there not knowing what to say

Because though their wish was fulfilled

Something more that day was killed

A certain charm they could not convey

Had now been evidently whisked away

Because just like the infamous yin and yang

They'll always need their other half

We can build these worlds inside our heads

We can twist and turn our world to our wits end

But in the end will it amend

The things we've done and words we've said

We must admit society is severely flawed with imperfections

And in the end when we make our selections

Of the wonders we decide to keep

Will we be left with a world one would seek?

We can wish upon a shooting star

To fix the worlds wide and far

We may wish with all our hearts to create a perfect utopia

But it truth we will most likely create a not so great dystopia

# Moonveil by Jarrad Lim

Neo Tokyo, Year 2100, June 6<sup>th</sup>, 9:00pm

## Prologue

Sounds of laughter echoed through the house as a young Hakuna raced down the hallway, closely followed by Yoru. “

“Got you!” giggled Yoru as he tackled Hakuna to the ground.

“Now, let’s go find Kiriko,” proclaimed Hakuna. The two friends began to search the house for Hakuna’s sister, until they heard a creak in the floor. The boys rushed to the sound but found no one there.

“She must be somewhere here,” said Yoru as they began to search.

“Boo!” suddenly shouted Kiriko as she sprung out of the wardrobe. Both the boys jumped up in fright, looking as white as a sheet of paper.

“Kiriko don’t ever do that again,” scolded Hakuna as he frowned at her.

“But you both looked so scared as if you saw a ghost,” laughed Kiriko as she mockingly jumped up.

“Come on, we have to go to bed now,” said Yoru.

A sudden commotion erupted outside their door. The sound of heavy footsteps reverberated through the house, sending chills down their spines. The children rushed downstairs to see what was going on. Suddenly the door burst open, crashing against the wall with a thunderous impact. The Imperial Guard, adorned in their formidable samurai armour, flooded into the house like an unstoppable force.

Hakuna's parents, armed with their katanas and the desire to protect their family, fought like demons against the onslaught. The clash of steel echoed through the house, but despite their valiant efforts The Imperial Guards were no match for them. They started to slice through their defences, staining the floor with blood. Hakuna’s parents fell to their knees, accepting their fate and they looked up at Hakuna for one final time before The Imperial Guards dealt the final blow.

From that moment a flame of ambition set alight in Hakuna that will burn bright for years to come. A fierce vengeance to kill the emperor and to avenge his fallen parents. To end the tyrannical rule of the emperor and restore peace to Japan.

Neo Tokyo, Year 2108, September 20<sup>th</sup>, 8:00am

## Chapter 1:

Sweat dripped down Hakuna's forehead as he woke up with a gasp. He looked around the room, realising it was just a nightmare. A constant one that has haunted all his life. It was a broken record replaying the very night his parents were killed, every night he relives these tragic memories. Hakuna hopes that the day when he kills the emperor, he will be able to find peace and let go of his past.

As Hakuna tried to calm his racing heart, he heard a gentle knock on the door. It was Kiriko, his sister, her eyes filled with concern. "Hakuna, are you alright? I heard you cry out," she asked.

Taking a deep breath, Hakuna nodded. "It's just the same nightmare, Kiriko. Every night, it comes back to haunt me," he responded.

Kiriko approached him, placing a comforting hand on his shoulder. "I still get the nightmare too, maybe today you'll find some peace. Go see the head of the Golden Order, he has urgent information."

Hakuna's heart quickened. The Golden Order, an organisation dedicated to restoring justice and overthrowing the tyrant Emperor, was his only hope. He had been adopted into the Golden Order at the age of 12, finding solace in their cause. That night the Golden Order assassinated all the Imperial Guard in the house and took in the three children, but it was too late as they had already killed Hakuna's parents.

Kiriko, Hakuna and Yoru always shared a strong bond from that day on, always protecting and caring for each other. Kiriko was always a gentle spirit, often acting as a calming force for Hakuna and Yoru. She had always been their anchor, providing support and encouragement when doubt consumed them. Kiriko was always able to defuse a situation and calm everyone down.

Hakuna made his way to the meeting room, where Yoru and Master Hikaru, the leader of the Golden Order, awaited him. Yoru greeted his old friend with a smile and a bear hug.

"It's your lucky day my friend," he said, grinning. "This is it, the day you have been waiting for."

"I have been waiting a decade for this, training hard and it finally comes down to this," Hakuna said.

"Indeed, Hakuna," Master Hikaru replied. His eyes gleamed with wisdom; years of experience etched into his features. "The time has come for you to fulfil your destiny. Our intelligence suggests that the emperor's vulnerability is at its peak. You are to infiltrate the palace and end his tyrannical reign with the Legendary Moonveil blade. Yoru will also have an extraction team on standby and Kiriko will show you your equipment."

Neo Tokyo, Year 2108, September 20<sup>th</sup>, 11:00am

Chapter 2:

Hakuna's journey through the streets of Tokyo revealed the true extent of the suffering inflicted by Emperor Katsu Haruto. Poverty-stricken families huddled in the corners of alleyways; their eyes filled with despair. Disease and hunger were rampant, while the wealthy lived in decadence, hoarding resources for themselves. Witnessing this injustice only fuelled Hakuna's determination, knowing he had to succeed in his mission to bring hope and prosperity back to the people.

Wearing his state-of-the-art Japanese samurai armour, which seamlessly merged tradition and technology, Hakuna ran across rooftops, heading towards the Imperial Palace. The armour, crafted with lightweight yet resilient materials, shimmered with a metallic sheen. Engraved patterns paid homage to ancient samurai warriors, while hidden within were advanced enhancements, including microscopic sensors for heightened awareness, retractable blades, dart-like projectiles for swift combat, adaptive camouflage for stealth, and an augmented reality display in the helmet for real-time information. As he

moved through the city, the cool and comforting embrace of his armour bolstered his resolve to bring justice to Tokyo and honour the legacy of his fallen parents.

As night fell, Hakuna reached the imposing walls of the palace. With nimble agility, he scaled them, relying on his training and the cool night air to mask his presence. Hakuna ran across the rooftop of the palace, heading towards an open window and jumping through it, into the palace.

Neo Tokyo, Year 2108, September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2:00pm

#### Chapter 3:

Once inside the palace, Hakuna's senses heightened. The air grew heavy with an eerie silence, as if the very walls held their breath, aware of his presence. The opulence and grandeur that surrounded him served as a stark contrast to the poverty he had witnessed on the streets. Long corridors stretched out before him, guarded by the patrolling Imperial Guard.

Hakuna moved with a cat-like grace, his steps silent as he weaved through the labyrinthine palace. He observed the Imperial Guards, their imposing figures standing as a barrier between him and his ultimate goal. With each guard he encountered, he dispatched them swiftly and silently, leaving no trace of his presence. The Moonveil blade, shimmering with a celestial glow, became an extension of his being, dancing through the air with deadly precision.

As he ventured deeper into the heart of the palace, he stumbled upon a hidden chamber adorned with priceless artefacts and treasures. He couldn't help but marvel at the wealth amassed by the emperor, knowing that it came at the expense of his people's suffering.

In the distance, Hakuna caught sight of a group of guards surrounding a lavish hall. He approached cautiously, concealing himself behind the shadows. Through the partially opened doors, he glimpsed the figure he had sought for so long, Emperor Haruto.

Neo Tokyo, Year 2108, September 20<sup>th</sup>, 4:00pm

#### Chapter 4:

Hakuna's heart raced as he prepared for the final confrontation. His mind replayed the memories of that fateful night when his parents fell at the hands of the Imperial Guard. He gripped the Moonveil blade tightly, its cold metal providing a sense of purpose and justice.

With calculated precision, Hakuna manoeuvred through the remaining guards, his every movement executed flawlessly. Slitting the throat of every guard while gagging them with a cloth that was soaked with an incapacitating agent. The element of surprise was on his side as he reached the hall where Emperor Haruto sat upon his ornate throne.

The room fell silent as Hakuna stepped into the light, the glow of the Moonveil blade casting an ethereal aura around him. Emperor Haruto's eyes widened in disbelief and fear as he recognized the determined figure before him.

"Who dares to challenge me?" the emperor spat; his voice laced with arrogance.

"I am Hakuna Shapiro of the Golden Order," Hakuna declared, his voice steady and nonchalant. "Your reign of tyranny ends here."

A battle ensued, the clash of steel echoing through the hall. Hakuna's skills with the blade were unmatched, his swift movements leaving the guards bewildered. With each strike, he drew closer to the emperor, his determination unwavering.

Their duel reached its climax as Hakuna unleashed a series of precise strikes; his movements guided by the memory of his fallen parents. With each swing of his sword, was another blow to the emperor's defences and soon enough the emperor fell to his knees, blood dripping from his clothes.

"You know my parents died like this falling to their knees and then being killed. Your Imperial Guards didn't show any mercy, so I won't either," said Hakuna furiously.

"You may kill me today, but my son will hunt you tomorrow," Emperor Haruto replied with certainty.

"Then I will be waiting for him," said Hakuna as he dealt a final, decisive blow, the Moonveil blade slicing through the emperor's heart and ending his tyrannical rule.

The room fell into an eerie silence, the weight of Hakuna's victory sinking in. He stood before the fallen Emperor, his chest heaving, a mixture of relief and sorrow coursing through his veins. Hakuna had finally avenged his fallen parents after 8 years of blood, sweat and tears.

Neo Tokyo, Year 2108, September 20<sup>th</sup>, 5:00pm

Chapter 5:

Hakuna emerged from the palace, the weight of his triumph carried on his shoulders. The Moonveil blade, now stained with the blood of the emperor, held the promise of a brighter future for the people of Japan.

As he made his way back to the Golden Order's headquarters, an extraction team met him on the outskirts of the city. Their presence affirmed his success, but he knew the battle was far from over. Japan was now left with a power gap, and the Golden Order scrambled to install a new government that would bring true peace and prosperity.

"So, the emperor is finally dead I assume," said Yoru as he greeted his old friend.

"Yes, the deed is done, and his reign of terror is over," replied Hakuna.

"20 years of tyranny is a long time, we must help Japan rebuild itself to its former glory," stated Yoru as the helicopter flew off, heading towards the Golden Order headquarters.

"Master Hikaru, I have completed my mission to kill the emperor," reported Hakuna as he entered the debriefing room.

“Thanks to you, we have finally taken control of Japan and now at this very moment the Golden Order is installing a government to regulate it,” replied Master Hikaru. “Now go rest and relax, you have earned after all.”

Hakuna walked out of the room and on his way back to his quarters he saw Kiriko. Hakuna’s sister ran towards and gave him a giant hug.

“I was so worried about you,” cried Kiriko as she let go.

“Everything went smoothly,” assured Hakuna. “But there is something I must tell you. When I killed the emperor, I didn’t feel any different and it didn’t help make peace over losing our parents.”

“Oh, Hakuna. These past eight years you have never stopped and grieved for the death of our parents. You have been training and training to kill the emperor to avenge our parents, but you must stop now and take the time to grieve before it consumes you,” informed Kiriko.

Neo Tokyo, Year 2108, September 20<sup>th</sup>, 7:00pm

Epilogue:

Word of Emperor Katsu Haruto's demise rippled through the shadows of Neo Tokyo, leaving a trail of chaos and uncertainty in its wake. In the heart of the Imperial Palace, as the lifeless body of the fallen emperor lay still, a young man named Takeshi Haruto received the fateful news. Overwhelmed by grief and consumed by an insatiable thirst for vengeance, Takeshi vowed to avenge his father's death and restore his family's honour.

Takeshi stormed out of his quarters and called a meeting for all the remaining Imperial Guards to gather at the meeting room. After Hakuna assassinated the emperor, the Golden Order sent in its agents to take control of the Imperial Palace and to finish off the remaining Imperial Guards. Some of them stayed but were slaughtered as the sheer numbers crushed them. Others fled into the mountains to regroup and form a counterattack.

“Who killed my father!?” roared Takeshi as he slammed his fist against the table. None of the Imperial Guard dared to speak as anger radiated from the furious son.

“You’re supposed to be the best of the best guards and yet some measly assassin killed my father, how did this happen?! I WANT ANSWERS!” yelled Takeshi.

“Sir, the assassin managed to infiltrate the Imperial Palace and take out all the guards. His name is Hakuna Shapiro and now the Golden Order has taken control of Neo Tokyo,” an Imperial Guard said quietly.

“I see,” hissed Takeshi.

“Shall we put a bounty on his head or call for aid from General Radahn?” asked the Imperial Guard.

“My uncle will only see that as a sign of weakness. No. We shall dispatch this rat ourselves and I will personally kill him,” ordered Takeshi. “We will leave at sunrise and hunt this Hakuna Shapiro. Retribution will be served, and we will take back Neo Tokyo!”

# Brayden Ng

## Chapter 1: The Invasion

Daniel had a quest he had to kill the king and end his reign of terror. Daniel's heart raced as he remembered the night that his parents gave their lives to protect him from the wrath of the Axzoxes. Daniel was just a few steps away from the alien stronghold, which was dark, desolate, and silent. The eerie howls and growls of the Axzoxes and the bloodcurdling sound of human screams filled the air as a crow perched itself on a pillar of skulls. Daniel slowly sneaked his way into the castle to end the Axzoxes evil reign of terror, he looked around surveying the area for any signs of large four-armed grey reptilian-like creatures with long tails and evil dark eyes.

Daniel edged his way through the entrance and slowly began climbing the steps and remembered how the Axzoxes wiped out three quarters of all life on Earth, he also remembered how the outsiders had enslaved humans stole their food, gold and loved ones. The grey monsters were highly intelligent and came from outer space. They landed in the middle of the everglades and since then have been terrorizing all living things. Daniel knew he had to do something and end the suffering of his people; his sweaty hands grasped his glowing purple blade as he nervously listened to howls that seemed like they were alerted to his presence. Daniel listened as the howls got louder and the footsteps seemed closer. Daniel clutched his blade tightly when Wham! A large crocodilian-like creature had pinned him to the ground, the beast opened its long mouth revealing large razor-sharp teeth the beast one bite and he was dead. Daniel groped for his glowing plasma blade and grabbed it; with one blow he sliced off the monster's head and felt its body go limp and felt the Axzoxes cold green blood soak his armor.

## Chapter 2: Flame and Blood

Daniel slowly got up and wiped away the green blood from his face and began to venture deeper into the darkness. Daniel heard eerie sounds of screams and felt like a large pair of red eyes were watching him. Wait they were, Daniel swung his blade which hid something hard and at once the whole room lit up. Those eyes were still fixing him with a cold gaze, but then he realized that the light was coming from the creature's throat, Daniel watched as the dragon rose and gave a mighty roar. Daniel shoved his blade into the dragon's throat and watched as its throat began to turn bright blue. The dragon gave a loud roar and spat out a long hot blue flame. Daniel ducked as the fire singed the top of his helmet which once belonged to his father. Daniel knew he could not kill the dragons, so he slid under the dragon's large body and pulled the lever.

At once the walls began to collapse enveloping the furious beast under piles of stone and rock. Daniel watched as the gates began to open to the dungeons of suffering. Daniel was watching as a group of Axzoxes were whipping a man, whose eyes shone with fear. Daniel knew he had to save the man so

with one blow he sliced the Axzoxes torso and watched as his upper half fell to the floor. “Run get out of here before they come back!” he yelled as the man ran towards the exit. Daniel sprinted through the corridor slaying any of the king’s servants that got in his way. Daniel raced towards the main courtroom and pointed the blade at one Axzoxes neck “Where is your king!” he demanded, pushing the blade closer to the alien’s neck. The grey alien now cowering with fear pointed at a large door.

### Chapter 3: The Final Confrontation

Daniel pushed open the door and watched as the king's throne turned around. On the throne sat an Axzox much larger than the rest “I am King Kolfaz Destroyymo!” Thundered the armor-clad creature sitting on the throne. King Kolfaz rose from his throne and pulled out a blade made from the toughest obsidian, Kolfaz put on his black shiny helmet and stepped down from his pedestal. Kolfaz glared at Daniel and swung his blade at Daniel’s neck. Daniel blocked the blade and swung back at King Kolfaz’s chest. Kolfaz shoved the blade at Daniel’s chest creating a deep gash in his golden armor. Kolfaz raised his sword and created more gashes in Daniel’s armor. Daniel remembered the suffering his people went through ever since the King took absolute control. Daniel watched a flashback of his parents' death and how the Axzoxes mercilessly beheaded them. Daniel’s eyes filled with rage as he struggled to get back up. Daniel was helpless as the King threw him against a nearby pillar shattering more of his armor. Daniel tried to crawl closer to his blade and grab it, but the evil warlord picked him up and slammed him on the floor. Kolfaz grabbed his blade and with one foot on Daniel’s chest began to cackle madly. “You cannot stop my reign of terror, the Axzoxes are the rightful rulers of this planet!” Kolfaz said as he pointed his obsidian blade at Daniel’s neck. Daniel suddenly remembered his vow and with one motion rolled out of the way of the black cold blade. Daniel reached for his Plasma sword which now began glowing a fierce red like his rage. Daniel swung his sword each blow for every life taken by the King’s evil reign. Daniel swung his blade hard destroying pieces of Kolfaz’s armor. Daniel charged at Kolfaz and with one blow sliced away part of the King’s helmet revealing his bloody scared face. Daniel cut off all the King’s limbs and had the King beg for mercy. “Please have mercy” begged Kolfaz as he sobbed at Daniel’s feet. “Please spare me!” begged the king. The king suddenly got up and at once his limbs began to grow back at alarming rates. “Did you actually think it was over?” demanded the king as he got on his feet. “It soon will be!” yelled Daniel as he remembered how the King showed no mercy when he finished the lives of Daniel’s parents. Daniel knew he had to end it right here and right now, and in one slice he cut the king’s head clean off.

### Chapter 4: The Aftermath

Daniel was bent over at his enemy's shell; everything was silent except for Daniel's rapidly beating heart. Daniel knew he had done it he slowly walked away; he carried Kolfaz's head in a sack to bring it back as evidence that he had ended his people's suffering and the king's evil reign of terror.

## Epilogue

Xyricthor walked into the throne room expecting to see his armor-clad father solemnly sitting on his throne. As Xyricthor approached he saw the blood-stained floor and he instantly knew what had happened. Prince Xyricthor Destroxymo crouched beside his father's corpse and his eyes burned purple with rage, his draconian tongue flicking furiously. Xyricthor picked up his father's helmet and broke away a small part so his long horns could fit through. Xyricthor stood on his father's miserable carcass and as began to devour the body he yelled "Assemble all troops, Daniel Sharipov's head will be mine!". The newly crowned king raised his double-bladed axe, and the army began to march...

# Gorilla Kingdom by Aakif Mahamud

## PROLOGUE

2050, Phillip Landon is a scientist in Ireland trying to find a way to help the gorillas to communicate with them as they are like humans. Phillip Landon was trusted by every single being in this world to succeed in helping the gorillas communicate with humans. Everyone was watching on tv at the zoo, Phillip Landon couldn't wait, he was so nervous, 3...2...1... 'AHHHHHH' the gorilla grew, picked up Phillip Landon and chucked him away as if he was a ball. That there was the sad end of the successful scientist named Phillip Landon whose life had ended tragically. The gorillas had initiated their plan to ruin the whole world and conquer!

## Chapter 1

2053, a year of sheer gorilla kingdoms. Humans were all the slaves of the mighty gorillas. Not even a single being could match the power of the ambitious apes. The world was limited for the original rulers, no one can even say a gorilla's name without mentioning the word 'lord'. This was a genuine madness although a group of human beings were courageous enough to challenge the gorillas to death. The gorillas had charted these people as the most wanted people on earth and their slaves were supposed to hunt for them. Little did they know that the slaves were helping this group to help save their lives and the rest of their fellow beings. The names of these people are not known as it is a security risk, the gorillas however are smart and will not be dumbfounded. This group lived in a place deep under the ground and only came out to research for their anti-gorilla injection. Recently, this group had visited the house of the now infamous scientist, Phillip Landon. They had found some vital information to their secret breakthrough. They could not believe their eyes; it was the plan of how Phillip Landon had created for his experiment. On the last page was written 'If this experiment ever goes wrong, collect the ingredients that are opposite to the original ingredients. They had almost everything needed.

## Chapter 2

All the group needed was carbon dioxide for oxygen and lava for water. The oldest member of the group headed out to the world to collect a sample of carbon dioxide. The others were on the hunt for lava, what they also knew was that lava was not far away as they were that deep underground. The member on the outer earth was unfortunately near the kingdom of gorillas and the guards got incredibly suspicious and had taken him for consultation. The tracker on this person was clearly visible that he was stuck in the kingdom of gorilla. So, the group had to sacrifice the brightest member to find what the other person knew. He was fortunate enough to collect this by communicating with his school friend who was a slave made to find the group. On the other hand, two other members have been understood as dead as they

could not find any contact. The good news was that the group had successfully managed to collect some lava. It was time, the gorillas were 'DOOMED'.

### Chapter 3

The whole group went out at night to inject just one gorilla, unfortunately they were all sitting around a campfire speaking about some plan to reduce the number of humans. It was until midnight the group had disappeared and formed in a line of the where the Gorilla King resides. The group with all their might pushed until... 'STOMP, STOMP, STOMP' a huge gorilla confronted, and he knew who had the injection. The group ran as fast as they could. The person who had the injection shoved the injection up the back of the gorilla. They went down the hill as fast as they could. They were '110%' sure the gorillas would deform into the friendly animal once again.

# Wood's Vow by Muhammad Mehmood

Islamabad Pakistan

We were so oblivious. For years we thought that technological advancement had come to an end. That we had achieved everything possible. But we were wrong. It was a time when developing countries were catching up to the rich and powerful ones. We were almost there, but then they came. The Americans. The whole time they were developing new technology, invisibility suits, complete bullet-proof armour, robots, Artificial Intelligence, drones, and military equipment, but we never realised. And now we live in hell. We will never forget it. The American Uprising.

Pakistan was never regarded as much, until a few years back, when we teamed up with NASA and sent two Pakistanis to Mars. They lived through it and experienced what was once impossible. My father, Asim Ali Woods was one of them. Now we were named useless. The Americans rule the world. They ranked each country according to how useful it was. The African countries have the worst. Too horrible to mention. All I can say is that they are enslaved again. South Asian countries such as Pakistan, have the next worst thing. Children spend their childhood operating factories, and the adults do the much more horrendous work. But where I lived was the worst. Welcome to Islamabad.

The whole city was a prison. Centred in a dome that keeps us safe from radiation. Islamabad was the only country that was bombed using nuclear bombs during The American Uprising. The decision was made to use Islamabad as a huge nuclear power plant. One mistake and we are all dead. Everyone born here has to stay here and work to death. If the work expectation was not met by an individual, they would be executed. There is no spare time, only breaks to eat and drink and sleep, then back to work. The city is not much of a city. Just a collection of windows-less brick buildings known as Dorms where we sleep. Outside the building is bare ground, littered with rubbish of all kinds. Being a "useless country", we have no access to the high-level technology the outside world has. Underneath the city is the nuclear power plant. It is a kilometre deep and a kilometre wide. Everyone in the city has a job in the power plant. No living thing can be found in Islamabad except humans. Long ago the world had switched to processed oxygen, so of course there were no trees. No animals can be found either. Our oxygen is processed in the invisible dorm by automatic machinery. It was just us and we had each other for hope.

Islamabad Pakistan, 9<sup>th</sup> May 2050

It was a hot day. A new batch of nuclear bullets was being processed. I was arranging the bullets into bullet-proof carbon boxes. The drones were going to arrive tomorrow to pick it up. Next to me, Mehmood was also arranging a batch of nuclear bullets. Mehmood was my older brother. The only family I had. The rest of my family died when I was 4. Mehmood almost died with them but survived with only one leg. We didn't talk much, we always had a problem with each other, or at least since our parents died. Talking wasn't much of an option anyway, we were behind on schedule with our work.

My ears started buzzing. That happens a lot when you work in a factory. But this time the buzzing was different. I started worrying, was I going deaf? Some other people started looking around. I sighed; it wasn't only me.

"Can you hear that," I whispered to Mehmood.

"Yes, the drones are coming," said Mehmood. His face was unreadable, but a hint of anger could be glimpsed in his eyes. The buzzing was getting louder and louder. Most of us left our work and rushed up to the ground. A large rectangular container was being carried by a drone which was followed by another hundred drones. This could only mean one thing; an officer was coming. The container landed softly on the ground and the drones formed a circle around the people. Nobody could leave. The container opened and a tall, burly man stepped out. He had short, neatly combed hair and a bushy moustache. His eyes were filled with hatred.

"Mehmood Ali Woods," said the officer. A path was cleared. Mehmood walked up to the officer with pride, his face rebellious. No matter how much I ask him to respect the officers, he never listens.

"You are required to do a Shock Test," said the officer, grinning with evil. That was Mehmood's breaking point.

"No!" screamed Mehmood. His eyes were wider than mine and tears were spilling out of them. The Shock Test is a test conducted by The Americans to test new and dangerous military devices invented by them. Nobody came back alive.

"Oh, yes, because of your missing leg, you are useless and do not meet the work effort required from everyone. Say your goodbyes," said the officer. A drone came down and grabbed Mehmood by the shoulders and took him away forever. I ran out of the crowd and tried to reach for Mehmood, but the officer grabbed me by the shoulder and tased me. I fell to the ground, my vision blurring as excruciating pain shot through my whole body. I could make out the officer, turn around in pride and return to the container. I saw the drones leave as I blacked out.

\*

I woke up in my bed. It was dark. I could guess it was night-time. Mehmood! I jumped out of my bed and ran across to his bed. He was not there. A dark figure approached from behind.

"I am sorry, Farid. Mehmood is gone" said the figure with condolence.

The fact dawned on me. I collapsed on the bed. I was lonely again.

"You let them take Mehmood, you coward, don't you realise how wrong this is, this is no way to live," I yelled. It was wrong of me to accuse him; it wasn't his fault. But I needed to yell at someone. The figure who I still couldn't make out, turned, and left. I had hurt someone innocent.

"I will hunt them, I will hunt the Americans, I will kill them all and make them suffer a painful death, today I make a promise to my people!" I vowed to the night. The figure stopped; I knew he had listened

to what I said. It was then that I could make out his face. An old man. He pitied me, I realised. Then he turned and left.

# In The Town of Bough by Sahil Patwardhan

In the town of Bough,  
Trees fell like dominoes,  
Cutting oxygen and all air important,  
The people ran,  
While the augury's sang,  
It was the world's end,  
No air to breathe in,  
No green to enjoy,  
The world's mistake,  
Had cost them more.

But the attitude of the world,  
Saw opportunity,  
A new future,  
Supported by one tree.

They would live off its oxygen,  
Every day and night,  
Biding their time,  
Until the time was right.

That one tree,  
Covered by man,  
No grass or nature to support its hand,  
Surrounded by art,  
The world's most important tree.

There a little boy saw,  
A chance to live on,  
A future to draw,  
With a perfect lawn,  
So of he went,  
With a plan,  
Made for the future.

## Watching Windows by Aanya Rajput

A twig cracked; a gust of wind soared all around the old huts as people watched out of their windows desperately hoping for the storm to surrender. I glanced helplessly for some sign of sunshine but none came. As I was going to step away from my tinted window something small, jagged and odd was caught by the corner of my right eye. I quickly swirled around, my eyes scanning the mossy greens, then I saw it.

It was risky business going outdoors on a day like this, even the old town's mayor had forbidden it. I grabbed a large black bag and a jacket; at the moment I didn't care for rules much. Rules were there to keep things in order, to keep a satisfactory community. Rules also applied very strongly to people who produced crime. Well, I wasn't about to produce crime, I was just about to feed my hungry curiosity.

Skipping on the edges of large puddles created by angry clouds, I heaved a great tired sigh for running so far, this place looked closer when I stared out my window for hours at a time. Then I saw what the object was; It looked like a capsule, but there were large symbols spread across it. My curious self was in desperate need for some form of excitement, so I heaved the object sideways and started scanning it for an opening.

After looking endlessly for a flap to open, or a handle I gave up. I bent in a squatting position aiming to put the object in my bag but, before it looked a lot smaller as I was at such a distance, now I was hesitant it would fit. As I hurled the object upwards my thumb caught something on the capsule and it suddenly flung open, there was a button on it the whole time disguised and unrecognisable. I threw myself towards the opened capsule and looked in shock at the things inside.

Documents, images and photographs were scurried messily, taking the capsules entire capacity. The photographs were dreadful; there were images of fires, large and hot. There were images of heavy storms and the destruction of fallen huts, fallen trees, fallen farms and a fallen town. My eyes caught the bottom of one of the photographs: Galway, 2031 Ireland. Then horror struck and I realised, this was a time capsule sent from the future.

This told me everything, the unexplainable storms and droughts reoccurring, our climate was deteriorating and soon our town would look like the one in the pictures. No one would believe me, but I knew I was right and I needed to take a stance and fix things before it was too late...

## Hurwana by Tijana Rakic

My blood boils to the top and feel myself heating up. There he stood. Tall as a tree, as strong as a bridge and as confident as a lion in the jungle. This was Hurwana. Everyone in our village wanted to be like him. Apart from me. I knew his secret. He stole all his abilities from all the children of our world, except for me. Hurwana could fly, teleport and do everything you could ever imagine. You're probably wondering what my power is? The power to heal. Although I was alone in this world, and no one would ever consider asking me for help. The people were all his. I feel in my gut that he is trying to take over, trying to be more powerful.... until it's too late....until we are ruined. When Hurwanys are born the first person to ever hold them is Hurwana. He discovered our powers. My mother was always the most sceptical of him. What made him more special than anyone else? What did he do with the babies? What would happen...if someone said no? That's what my mother did. She had me in secret. I was born as I am still now. It's our mission to expose him for his lies, dishonesty and cruelty. The day will come. I feel it. In the heart of our city is where Hurwana lived, high in the angelic skyscraper. Somewhere in there laid the secret weapon to destroy Hurwana, for without his powers he was merely just the average person. I set out on one misty morning for revenge with one goal in mind; destroy Hurwana. Luckily, I still had my power, elastibility; meaning I become whatever shape I wish and become invisible for a hour a day. 1 hour. I trench through the double doors and head towards the elevator and enter as swiftly and discreetly as possible. I make my way up to the very top level for I am sure he would position himself there and climb up through the vent navigating myself to his section. There he his. Experimenting with all his powers. That's when I forgot the most important part of my plan, he has the power of invisisen, he can sense the invisible. He slowly turns towards me as I edge back through the vent. Too late.

# Korea 2088 by Zach Tan

2088 Korea

I woke up to the piercing wail of sirens in the distance. That sound would be ingrained in any citizen of this distorted prison we call home. Worry lines etched across my face, and my messy hair added to the overall sense of exhaustion.

Ever since the fall of the government, Life only took a turn for the worst. Once a symbol of stability and Peace, the government had crumbled under its own weight. Corruption seeped into every nook and cranny, suffocating the last remnants of hope. We were promised a new world, instead, we were spoon-fed lies and deceit. The gap between the rich and the "lowlifes" grew bigger with every passing minute, leaving us to struggle in the decaying remains of what was once a thriving metropolis.

Stepping outside my battered apartment, I trod carefully through the debris littering the streets. The city now stood as a desolate wasteland, its former grandeur swallowed by decay and neglect. Buildings stood like hollow skeletons, shattered windows staring blankly at the devastation below. The air tasted toxic, a constant reminder of the chaos that now defined our existence.

Navigating through the labyrinthine alleys, I couldn't help but notice the growing presence of the Enforcers—an unrelenting military special ops unit tasked with maintaining the iron grip of the government. They patrolled the streets with an air of authority that bordered on sadistic pleasure. Fear had become our constant companion, shadowing our every move.

Yet, amidst the desolation, pockets of resistance emerged. The Rebellion, an underground organisation committed to overthrowing the oppressive regime, operated in the shadows. Their members fought tirelessly to expose the government's lies and bring about a revolution. I had been recruited into their ranks, my skills as a hacker proving invaluable in our battle against tyranny.

Our underground headquarters concealed deep within the city's underbelly, buzzed with activity. Strategists gathered around monitors, tracking the government's movements, while engineers toiled to create the tools necessary to dismantle them. We were a diverse group of rebels, bound together by a shared purpose and an unwavering determination to reclaim our freedom.

Each operation we undertook was a calculated risk. One wrong move could mean being crushed beneath the government's iron fist. But we had a plan—a plan to expose the lies, dismantle the corrupt system piece by piece, and ignite the flame of revolution. It was too dangerous to sit there and twiddle your thumbs. It was either fight or perish.

Months turned into years as we waged a silent war against the oppressors. We sabotaged their surveillance systems, leaked classified documents, and rallied the citizens to our cause. The city became a powder keg, ready to explode at any moment. The government, sensing the growing unrest, clung to power with increasing desperation, resorting to violence and propaganda to suppress our uprising.

And then, the day arrived—the day we had been waiting for. The streets overflowed with protesters, their united voices echoing through the concrete canyons. The government responded with brutal force,

deploying Enforcers armed with batons and tear gas. But we were prepared. We fought back, outnumbered only resisting an unquenchable fire in us

Amidst the chaos, I found myself standing face-to-face with the government's tyrannical leader—a symbol of greed and oppression. His eyes bore into mine, filled with a cold, calculated determination. In his gaze, I saw not just fear, but a shrewd intelligence, aware of the imminent threat to his long-lasting reign. And then, with an overwhelming surge of determination, I lunged forward...

## A Dystopian World by Adveka Thurairajah

An eerie world surrounded me. One like no other. I felt helpless & hopeless. Nothing could ever save me from this horror. The light from the window seeped through, blinding my sight. Its tail slowly moved across the room, running into the door. I stared at the rat. The door of the enclosed slum flew wide open. I slowly exhaled, realising that the human was one of us. My heart warmed. I was afraid every time any source of light entered the slum. If they were a privileged human, then so much could go wrong in seconds. A trail of blood dripped behind him. In this world, for us, food was scarce and so was shelter, water, basically a good life. Sweat trickled down my spine. My mouth felt dry. In those 15 days, all I tasted was a minute hint of breadcrumbs. The scent of sorrow lingered in my nose as he dragged the creature all the way to his bunk, leaving with it a bright red trail of blood. My tasteless mouth cried in agony as my sappy ears earned to hear the whisper that we would be out soon. It was all I wanted.

I stared at him relentlessly, my eyes drooping towards the floor of the slum. More than needing sleep, my tongue was begging in mercy to taste any sort of food. The slaughtered animal lay like a newborn child in his hand. The revolting whiff of the blood spread to all their noses, suddenly their eyes were wide open. They gaped at the poor dog, but I couldn't help myself, so did I. He sighed in disbelief, knowing that there was no way he was going to eat this creature all alone, in complete peace. My mouth watered, saliva from my dry tongue, dripping down onto the dirty, corrugated iron floors they had made us sleep on for what had felt like years. Or maybe it was more. Who knew? We hadn't seen light in centuries. Time goes on, and we don't know it, but the wrath and exhaustion inside us feels it every. Single. Second. My bare, shivering arms covered in scratches, blood and scabs dragged across the floor as I attempted to get myself a serving. It felt as if I simply couldn't breathe. In this world, they didn't put children first. They didn't give a single damn about us. We didn't have any worth, so it didn't matter. We were simply blurred as a background in a bigger picture. The congestion that filled my chest cried in pain as I hoped it would all be ok. Or would it? The answer was waved in our face like an envelope, but the letter would never be read.

The ear coated in gore was tossed towards my broken nail, I stared at it. A single beam of hope withered throughout my face as he scowled at me. With my one working arm, I grabbed the ear and danced with joy inside, clutching it tightly so no one had a chance to steal it. Or so I thought. They jumped like animals towards me, and slowly but surely, the single ear flew out of my hand. It was tossed like a parcel from one to another. I stared at the poor thing, in absolute disbelief. I had better start counting now. How many days does one have to go without food to die? The scent from my breath that mixed day old saliva and blood swam up my nose. I gulped in horror, it was a nauseating feeling to see them devour the blood, bones, skin, sweat and tears of something that was to be mine. Not a single droplet of guilt laid in the pit of my stomach as I stared at the eyes of the dog. He was just like us. Once in a happy world with fair rules, a good life and surrounded by smiling faces. But now they were fatigued

faces. Ones that you would feel sick of at the sight. But now he is dead. And soon we were going to be too.

They gaped at me as my tastebuds groaned at how much of the creature I had just devoured. I smirked at their revolted faces. Karma. The word echoed in my mind. My face lit up with the fact that I had done whatever it was to irritate them off. A larger smile slowly started to spread on my face like butter on bread. Maybe the first time in a year actual happiness had been brought to me. Just maybe.

Their pique faces screamed with irks as an evil giggle whispered through my mind staring at how irritated I had got them. Their jaws dropped in awe as they watched me. But despite all this, I did not utter a single word. Every one of their faces were a canvas and I was the painter. I was so done living in a world where I was simply a small pawn in their bigger chess game. Fury travelled through my mind. I was so fed up and moreover sick of the treatment I was getting. This was going on for far too long. Every single person in this room, including myself, knew it was wrong. Living in a world that is forced to take life from you? Something had to be done and if I didn't start now, there would be no time left.

The clock's face winked at me as I stood up, feeling like an empress. My baggy clothes brushed against the grimy floor as their colourless faces turned towards me.

"This world is a prison, and we are all the inmates. But for doing what? Why do we deserve to be cursed into this tragedy? Although, it is with my pleasure that I announce to you that if we work together, we can stop this." My breath cried in agony; it was the first time I had uttered a whole sentence in months. "We are all far too scared to speak up, so it's time we do it now!" The power these words held made me ponder if we had somewhat of a chance to leave this monster. But not a single person agreed. The silence was so loud I stepped down from my deteriorating bunk as not a single nod approached me. The confidence was a visitor knocking on my heart's door. Were they going to answer, agree, anything? I would rather stay here for years than endure the silence any longer. As I slumped my shoulders and held my breath, slowly walking to my bed, the silence stopped.

# The Future by Baxter Trum

Once there was a boy named Max who lived in a futuristic dystopia. The government was greedy and corrupt, and Max was tired of living in a world where he had no control over his life. He saw the extreme social and economic class divides, the mass poverty, and the environmental devastation, and he knew that something had to change. Max decided to secretly gather a group of rebels who shared his vision of a better world. They met in secret, planning and strategizing how to overcome the government and bring change to their world. As they worked to build their movement, Max and his rebels faced many challenges. They were constantly hunted by the government, and their lives were in danger every day. They had to be careful not to be caught, and they had to work hard to gain the trust of others who were also tired of the government's corruption. Despite the challenges, Max and his rebels continued to fight for their cause. They knew that the world they lived in was not sustainable, and they were willing to risk everything to bring about change. In the end, Max and his rebels were successful. They overcame the government, and they were able to bring about positive change to their world. The social and economic class divides were lessened, mass poverty was reduced, and the environmental devastation was addressed. Max and his rebels had succeeded in creating a world where individuality was celebrated, and people were free to live their lives without fear of oppression. Max and his rebels knew that their fight was not over, but they were proud of what they had accomplished. They had shown that even in a world where everything seemed hopeless, there was still hope for a better future.

# The Next Generation by Lakshmi Yen

I wake up to the sound of guns, bombs and screaming around me. It has been a constant since my early childhood. The war had been raging for years. The sky was a permanent smoggy grey and the streets were filled with rubble and destruction. Humans were living in unending constant fear of themselves.

The government had discovered technology far beyond their time and had started out with ruling their people with an iron fist, then they used it to go attack other countries. Take them for themselves. The current generation had been raised in war and hopefully the next one would not.

I was part of a group of people that wanted this to end and were working towards it, we felt that our lives were too, shaped by war to be able to change things, make it better but we did not know what better was. So, we would raise our children better. Without war, without the threat of something coming to kill you in the night. Without the fear.

The war had started out like any other war did, someone did something that offended other people and those people did something that made someone mad, etc. But along the way humanity had advanced so much that a war like the one now would destroy everything. Even now we are tipping over the edge of no return, waiting for someone else to make a move but too afraid of the consequences if we did it ourselves. So, we were at a standstill and with luck that standstill would turn into a treaty between the opposing countries, both too proud to surrender. And with even more luck our children would at least for a little while learn from this event, try to keep the peace but...

Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it.

# The Ocean's Servants by Leon Yu

On a lone island in the vast open sea,  
Is where found the last people on Earth will be,  
Where old sea men speak of creatures long gone,  
As the people listen to the ocean's song.  
And just before all hope is lost,  
Across the sea a ship they will accost.  
A ship they will be saved by,  
A ship that will take them,  
A ship that will bring them,  
To lands long forgotten,  
Where ancient creatures roam.  
A sanctuary,  
At the end of the Earth.

## Untitled by Milano Zhang

In a world where differences were harshly judged, a young boy born with a silver spoon in his mouth had an especially difficult time fitting in. Growing up in a society where everyone was expected to pull their own weight, the boy was always aware of the gap between himself and the other children. He was expected to be successful and live up to the expectations of those around him, but he was also aware that his wealth and privilege made him stand out in a negative way. As a result, he felt that he was constantly judged for his differences and he struggled to find acceptance.

Compelled to hide his wealth, the boy grew up in a world of secrets and lies, never quite able to find his place. He was never able to join the other children in their conversations, as they discussed the hardships of their lives and the struggles they faced. To them, he was an outsider, a wealthy boy who had never experienced their struggles and could never understand them. When the other children talked about not having enough money to buy food, the boy felt ashamed and isolated as he had never experienced that kind of financial hardship. He was so ashamed of his privileged life, he was hesitant to even join the conversation, knowing he could never truly relate to the other children.

The boy tried to fit in, struggling to prove he was like everyone else. He would trade his designer clothes for hand-me-downs to blend in with the other children. However, he was always met with suspicion and distrust. He was different from the other children in some way, whether it be his personality, his background, his beliefs, or something else, and this made the other children uncomfortable. As a result, they often treated him differently than they would treat one another, leading to gossip and ridicule. Despite his best efforts, the boy was continually met with suspicion and distrust. The other children's discomfort with his differences caused them to treat him as an outcast.

In a world where wealth was looked down upon, the boy struggled to find acceptance. He was constantly judged and criticised, and his attempts to fit in always failed. The boy slowly realised that his wealth and privilege were the very things that kept him from fitting in. As his sense of isolation and loneliness grew, the boy had to face the reality that his wealth and privilege would always be a barrier between him and finding acceptance in the world. It was as if the boy was walking in a room full of mirrors, each one reflecting back a distorted, negative image of himself that was impossible to escape.

Finally, realising he would never fit in, the boy stopped trying. He accepted his fate and embraced his wealth and privilege. Everywhere he looked, he was surrounded by people who were different from him. He felt like he had no place in this world and that no matter what he did, he would never be accepted. He decided that the only way to be happy was to accept who he was and use his privilege to make the world a better place. He recognized that it was the only thing that could keep him safe in this dystopian world.

The young man soon realised that his wealth and privilege were not only a means of protecting himself, but also a means for him to open doors to those around him and provide opportunities for them as well. He used his resources to help those in need, providing food and shelter for those without. Eventually, he created a job training program in his community. By using his resources to benefit others,

he found a sense of belonging and purpose he had never felt before. The experience was similar to unlocking a secret garden, as he discovered that his wealth and privilege had the potential to create an oasis of opportunity for those around him. By using his resources to benefit others, he was transforming a barren landscape into a lush and vibrant paradise.

# Dystopian Hero by Lucas Chong

The wind howled across the deserted land. Paul stood on a tree branch, overlooking the large bones sticking out of the land. He didn't know what to say. He had done so much to get up to this point and all he saw was yellow dots like salt but softer, and bones sticking out of it. Blood trickled down his head. He felt many things. Pain. More Pain. Regret. More Regret. If only he didn't see it, then all this wouldn't have happened.

It was a day like no other. The 700 people were singing happily inside our tiny little world of peace. Paul stretched and yawned loudly. He walked slowly out of his bunk bed, feeling sore from doing his chores. He didn't want to get out of bed. He wanted to sleep more.

“MORNING P!”

Paul turned around, waking himself up, surprised from the yell. On top of his bed was his close friend, Lincoln. Paul wanted to say morning back, but felt as if he didn't have the strength to. Instead, he let out another yawn.

“Come on P, you get out of your daze. You're gonna get yelled at by the big boss if you don't wake up. It's almost 9.30.”

Paul stared at Lincoln blankly.

“I don't care.”

Lincoln sighed. He then walked out of my dorm room, waving his hand. Before he went, he reminded him, “Don't forget, we have engine duty today.” Paul let out a huge sigh. Engine duty was the worst. Everything in the engine room was weird. There were weird smells which the council called ‘gas’, coming from the weird long thing which the council called ‘pipes’. He didn't understand the purpose of the engine room. None of them did. All the 700 people knew about the engine room is that it gave them what we needed to survive. Paul changed out of my sleep uniform and got into my duty uniform, praying the usual prayers they were meant to say. He took a deep breath. Today was going to be a long day. But Paul didn't know how long and gruesome it would truly be.

Paul strolled down the hallway to the engine room, fixing up his collar and vest. He felt dreadful, being able to smell the ‘gas’ from the engine room. He didn't want to be there. Paul walked over to the bronze door and twisted the wheel keeping the door shut tightly and opened it. A huge rush of air or as he knows it as ‘gas’ engulfed him. Paul felt lightheaded. Something was off. This didn't feel like the engine room. There were things that should be in the engine room that were at where he was at. Paul took one step in.

“Don't move a muscle.” Two familiar voices rang in his ears as he felt someone cover his mouth.

“Don't panic, it's us P.”

Paul turned around, seeing Lincoln but there was someone else. He shook off the hand on his mouth. Shock ran through his body. It was Ally. The one who was presumed dead. One of his closest friends. Before Paul could think, he heard explosions coming from outside the room.

“What is going on?” Paul exclaimed.

“The engine room has exploded and be QUIET,” Lincoln murmured to me with a bit of rage in his voice.

“BUT-“

# Free Thinkers by Aiden Khor

The year was 2087 and the world had changed drastically since the days of our grandparents. In the pursuit of progress and efficiency, governments and corporations had become more powerful than ever before. The world was divided into two classes - the elites who had access to technology, education, and healthcare, and the rest who struggled to survive.

The government had implemented a new policy to curb the population growth, and only those with the financial means to afford a licence were allowed to have children. This had created a class of people who were born into poverty and despair, with no hope of ever improving their lives.

In this world, there was a group of rebels who called themselves the "Free Thinkers." They believed that everyone deserved to have the same opportunities and rights, and they were willing to fight for it. They would often meet in secret locations to discuss their plans and recruit new members.

One day, a young woman named Maya joined the group. She had grown up in one of the poorest neighbourhoods and had seen firsthand the injustices of the system. She was determined to fight for a better future.

The Free Thinkers had planned a demonstration to protest against the government's policies. Maya was excited to participate, but as she made her way to the location, she noticed that the streets were eerily quiet. When she arrived, she saw that the government had sent their army to disperse the protesters.

Maya and a few other rebels were able to escape, but they soon found themselves trapped in a deserted alley. The government's soldiers had surrounded them, and they had no way out. Maya knew that this was the end, but she refused to give up without a fight.

As the soldiers approached, Maya took out a small device from her pocket. It was a grenade that she had stolen from the rebels' arsenal. She activated the device and threw it at the soldiers, hoping to create a distraction that would allow her and the others to escape.

The grenade exploded, and Maya felt a searing pain in her chest. She collapsed to the ground, surrounded by the bodies of the soldiers and her fellow rebels. As she took her last breath, she knew that her sacrifice would not be in vain. The Free Thinkers would continue their fight for a better world, and someday, they would succeed.

But for now, the world remained dystopian, with the government's iron grip growing tighter each day. Maya's story was just one of many tragedies in this bleak world, where hope was scarce and freedom was a distant dream.

## Curiosity by Amelia Bradshaw

Siela UMBER sighed as she gingerly sat down on her assigned resting mat. She had just finished her shift. 10 hours of fetching items and serving robots does get tiring, but she endures, she always does. Through every punishment, every near impossible task, every harsh remark, she endures. Through every time a robot laughed as they called her 'dumb meat sack'. Every time they decided to make her attempt an equation or riddle. Every time they gave her a hard task just to show how slow and flawed humans are. She endures.

Her parents couldn't, so she would for them. Though, just the thought of finding them that one day, dangling from the ceiling, only supported by bedsheets, made Siela's turquoise eyes leak. They were weak, so she would be strong for them. She will not allow herself to take the easy way out like they did.

Siela pushes her fluffy, brown hair out of her eyes as she realises she's been leaning forward and blankly staring at the ground, again. The girl lies down and raises her left arm above her. Using the other arm, she traces the scars. She went along all the white lines jaggedly spreading across her arm as if they were lightning bolts dancing along her lightly tanned skin. To everyone they displayed her bravery and her rebellion against their oppressors, but to her they served as a reminder of what happens if she ever considers herself any more than 'human scum'.

She hated herself from 7 years ago, she hated herself then too. She hated everything after her parents were gone. She was only 9 when anger filled her to the brim. When she observed the robots for flaws. When she gained the courage to act out against them. When she was overpowered and punished. They shattered her arm for such an offence, made sure she never acted out again. Sure, they put a cast on it to let it heal so she could perform her duties again, but it never quite worked the same. It was a bit stiffer and couldn't take as much weight. Why? Siela doesn't know, they don't have what the grandparents called 'schools' anymore. Can't risk a human getting too smart or you won't be able to make fun of them!

There is an old saying that she heard once, 'curiosity killed the cat', or something like that. She didn't know what a cat was but she must have been one, because her curiosity for the robots mechanics, mixed with her anger, damn near killed her. But that was in the past, Siela can't change it now.

## World War 4 by Christian Eng

I never thought that I would live through World War 4, let alone see the end of it. It was a war that no one wanted, yet it happened anyway. It was a war that left nothing but devastation and loss in its wake. I remember the day that it all started. It was a typical day, I was going to work and everything seemed normal. But as I walked to the bus stop, I could feel that something was different. There was a tension in the air, a sense of unease that I couldn't explain.

When I got to work, my boss told us that the government had declared war. We were told to go home and prepare for the worst. I didn't know what to think, I had never been in a war before. But I knew that I had to prepare for the worst. I went home and turned on the news. The world was in chaos. Countries were aligning themselves with either side, and it was clear that this was going to be a long and bloody war. I watched as the first bombs fell, cities were destroyed, and innocent people were killed. It was then that I knew that my life was never going to be the same again. I packed a bag and left my home, not knowing where I was going or what I was going to do.

For months, I wondered. I went from place to place, trying to avoid the violence and destruction that surrounded me. I saw things that no one should ever have to see. I saw children crying over their dead parents, families torn apart, and entire cities reduced to rubble. But despite all of this, I still had hope. I met people who were fighting for a better world, and who were trying to make a difference. We banded together and formed a community of survivors. We helped each other in any way we could, shared what little we had, and stood up against the violence and chaos. We had to be careful though. We couldn't trust anyone, not even our own government. They were desperate to win the war and would do anything to achieve victory.

I remember the day that we were ambushed. We were travelling to a nearby town, looking for supplies. But we were caught off guard. We were outnumbered, outgunned, and we had nowhere to run. I watched as my friends were killed one by one. Trembling with fear, I tried to fight back, but it was no use. I was terrified of what would happen so my punches and movement were off place and eventually I was knocked unconscious and woke up in a prison cell.

I don't know how long I was there, but it felt like an eternity. I was beaten, tortured, and interrogated. I got used to the bone-breaking pain. But it still hurt me that my comrades and soldiers died. They wanted to know where our community was, whom we were working with, and what our plans were. But I never gave in. I knew my friends would be in danger if I told them anything. So I kept my mouth shut, endured the pain, and waited for my chance to escape. My spirit never died out.

Finally, after what felt like months, I was released. They thought that they had broken me, but I was still determined to fight. Some of my fingers were cut off. Half of the skin on my face was not to be seen and I still had huge gashes on my back. I stumbled my way back to our community, and we continued to fight against the government and their allies. I was more of a support and motivational speaker now rather than a fighter, but I still did my part in helping my friends. It wasn't easy, but we never gave up. We

were determined to make a difference, to create a better world out of the ashes of the old one. And slowly but surely, we started to make progress.

We were able to help more and more people, to provide them with food, water, and shelter. We could fight back against the government, push them back and reclaim some of the territories we had lost.

But the war didn't end, endless bloodshed continues to ravage the globe. However, the peace in our small section of the land we conquered, seemed to grow in the newborn babies. It was still different from the old I left behind, but it should do, for the next generation.

# Untitled by Melody Mohmedi

Before this story begins, just know that there is no way out, ever. You are born into this world and stay in this world forever, but Maranda had to truly find that out for herself.

'Beep Beep' her alarm rings, "Wake up this instant, a new day awaits; of doing your duties. Hurry up girls, hurry up" the cabin manager scolds. The girls put their clothes on and marched to their jobs. "Miss Carrera, before you leave, I'd like to have a word with you" announced the sergeant, Maranda kept on walking. She didn't want to make another interaction with that monster, after what she'd done, she could never trust anyone from this place again. They had taken her away, away from her home, who did it you may wonder, 'the bad men' as she called them.

"Miss Carrera, I just want a second to speak with you", "No" she whispered harshly, she didn't want to scream as it would cause a scene, but she knew that the sergeant would cause one. "Miss Maranda Carla Carrera, my office this instant" she raged. I picked my head up from the ground and looked around.

"Look around, we are all stuck here, you can't send me away so what are you going to do, huh?"

"I am going to send you to my office, that's what" she scolded. "And why should I listen to you? Look around Stacy, you can't take me away, I'm stuck here forever. You can't hurt me because I know everything about this place, every secret and every whisper I hear it all. So, what are you going to do about it."

"I-I will um" the sergeant stumbled. Maranda had already walked off, confidently but deep down still in rage. As she trudged off, Maranda knocked into a lightbulb on the ceiling, the lightbulb has been known to be the only one that doesn't work, it's been a mystery for years as to why it hasn't turned on. She pounded the bulb one more time out of anger. 'flick' the light was flashing.

"The light- the light" she pointed to it in shock, the light it turned on" The sergeant looked at her disapprovingly, "Stop lying Maranda, I know this is one of your tricks". I swear, just please look at the light. Her hope slowly started to fade, c'mon, c'mon..." Nothing happened. "Oh, c'mon now, I'm not that gullible to believe that I am Maranda? Get over your fantasies, just head back to your cabin" but she had still kept onto that bit of hope. she knew it would turn on again. Oh how she wished that the light would ever turn on, how she could ever leave, find a way out, it just felt like a never ending maze, hoping that one day she could find the passage out. 'Ding' the lightbulb had switched on without her even noticing. "That's it, I got it, find the secret passage."

As the weeks went by, she picked up every detail of every flaw in the world, or whatever it was. The codes, the combinations, the tricks, the flaws. She knew it all. But was it all a maze? All just some lies. Maybe there was no escape, as they say you are born into this world, and you cannot leave. But could Maranda solve this mystery once and for all? One morning, this morning just felt different. Not in a good way, or a bad way. Just strange. Nothing like she's ever felt before, out of the ordinary, like it was a sign. Maybe it was. Today felt special. She didn't know if it was the morning cool breeze that swished past her face or the fact, she was the first to awaken, an hour early before the rest.

Maranda rose from her bed, a slight feeling of faintness from how quickly she stood up. The eerie surrounding was so silent that you could hear a pin drop. From afar, there was a faint light that she could barely see through the misty fog. A sign? She thought to herself. As she walked closer to it the cries of children were heard back from the cabins, she knew this was now or never. She started to sprint faster and faster; it was like she wasn't even moving, just still, a never-ending loop is what it felt like. As Maranda had been running for what had felt like years, she approached a wall ahead of her, with some sort of button. A big red button. And all though it felt very tempting she hesitated. Did she really want to escape this so-called perfect world? Did she really want to find out what was on the other side? Did she want to escape her bubble?

'BZZZZZ' 'Gates are now opening; the system has been unlocked'. Maranda started in awe and pinched herself, never would she believe this was real. "User detected, Miranda Carla Carrera, user not a part of system." 'System, what system? She thought. "User will delete, user deactivate, user error, error, ERROR" 'Delete? This must be some sick joke. "Countdown till deactivation starts now, 10,9,8,7,6,5,4,3,2,1. User, goodbye". "NO WAIT" she shrieked.

And from that day on, Maranda Carla Carrera was never seen or heard from again. Like they said, there is no way out. Ever.

# Swimming Land by Nevie Crouch

Lilac was always being watched. She was under 24/7 surveillance for her mother trying to stop the world from being sunk. All she could do was buy the gear to stay alive in this new found ugly world, where everyone was basically swimming above the place they had once called home. There was no school, nothing. At least everyone was getting exercise looking silly while swimming around.

One day, Lilac was treading water in the middle of absolutely nowhere, when she heard whispers. From what she had overheard, America and some other places were going into war. Lilac was so confused, because surely in a time like this everyone would band together to help each other out, but typical humans, starting a war.

There had been small conflicts recently, but never word of starting a war, until today. Later that night, there was an official letter looking for people to fight in the army. What were they after, Olympic swimmers?

After a few weeks, all word of war had died out. After about 1 month, everyone had started swimming back into their houses, where there was oxygen, and staying in there. Soon after it was just me and my mum, walking, or swimming, the streets.

One day, she had to leave her mum. The government was forcing them to separate because they were 'being rebellious'. All they were doing was trying to drain some of the water that had flooded their beautiful home. They were stuck, Lilac had to leave her mum, and who knows where they were going to take her. Lilac got thrown into the back of a boat, and taken away. The control police drove her away for hours. She drifted off to sleep, scared of where she would wake up.

Lilac had absolutely no idea where she was. The sun had set, and it was pretty dark. The control police dropped her off alone, at an old house, with a lifetime supply of food, and other necessities. She was given 1 last warning...

Typical Lilac had ruined it 2 days later. Her final warning. She had no idea what was going to happen. The control police came to the place she was staying after she had disobeyed 4 laws. Suddenly, a man held a gun to Lilac's head. It was all over. She closed her eyes and took a breath.

TO BE CONTINUED...

## *World War III* by Sophie Newbury

Walking down the abandoned streets of Melbourne, I glanced around at the wrecked tomb like houses, where no one could live anymore. The ongoing world war was hitting hard, and many countries were suffering losses. Ruined buildings everywhere, the result of nuclear bombing. Plants were scarce and animals were rare. We had heard stories of plentiful food in 2023, but now that it was 2081, that was impossible. The human population was declining at an alarming rate. Just last year, there were still 47 million people. Now there are only 26 million. The result of war, I guess.

I had been the only survivor from the bombing of Melbourne City. I hurried along the old cobbled streets, looking around for a good place to shelter. My arm had been badly broken and ruined in the bombing, and was in desperate need of fixing.

Suddenly, while I was lost in my thoughts, the loud humming of a warplane filled my head. Luckily, it was a warplane from my own side, and I didn't get bombed. Everyone was forced to walk around each day, and all the things that the government had drilled into us. Now, everyone would walk around each day, more scared of the government than getting killed by the bombs. Maybe it would be a mercy to be ended. It felt like we were trapped in a never-ending battle.

The pain in my arm was becoming more insistent. I wondered if it would ever get better after this. Maybe I wouldn't survive after all. I needed food, water, and somewhere to sleep. My godfather's voice sounded in my head. If you are injured badly, and don't have medical help, don't go to sleep. You may never wake up. Remembering gave me a little more strength, and I fought the heaviness of my eyelids. Just a little while longer, I thought to myself. After I get help, I will get better. Then I would sleep. Sleep until I was sated.

The weariness got to me, washed over my brain. I couldn't keep the sleepiness at bay any longer. Laying down on a haystack, I let myself drift into a never-ending sleep...

# Parting Skies by Gemma Roberts

Prologue:

The world is a dark hole that we're stuck in. We try to climb out of it, but the walls crumble at our touch. We try to escape, but the world has no intention of letting us go. The hole has no ending and no beginning. It is an endless loop in time, and we will stay here. Forever in the darkness.

Ch 1- A discovery

Grey. It consumes our lives. It swallows the sky and reigns over us relentlessly, like a ruler hungry for adoration and power. It is all we know and all that we will ever know. We cannot imagine a world without grey. Even when the fog that dominates over us thins, we can only glimpse at the meagre light that filters through it.

Grey had been the only thing Leif had ever known. Colour was a myth, a legend of over two thousand years ago, and people that believed it still existed were thought to have gone mad. The only light he had experienced was bright, harsh white light that penetrated into every room and invaded his eyelids. Leif liked to fantasise about the stories he had read about a world with colour, where animals and plants still existed and there was something called a sun, which was supposed to be the epicentre of all lifeforms. This grey, bleak wasteland in which Leif lived in was his prison.

Leif had no one. No friends, no family. It was just him against the world. Until Leif had stumbled into The Nook, he had looked down and scorned those who believed there was another reality to the one they were in. The Nook was really a small room about the size of a closet, but it held more knowledge than Leif had ever seen in his life. In The Nook books spilled out of overstuffed shelves, their spines cracking and crumbling with age. As soon as Leif had stepped into the room, he had noticed that there was something different about it. It was in the air and he could sense it.

He had realised with a shock that in this room were titles of all the books that had been forbidden by The Ruler. He knew immediately why, because their titles told a story of colour. "Colour- A guide" and "The mysterious disappearance of colour" were just two of many banned books. Leif knew that he should run away from these treacherous ideas, that he should report this to someone. But something kept him from doing what his brain was frantically urging him to do. For once in his life, he had stumbled across something that was all his. A secret of his own. All his life he had been sharing things, been controlled by someone, and he allowed himself just this tiny liberty of having something he didn't have to share with anyone. So, he found himself picking up one of the crumbling books and with shaking hands, opening it to the first page.

## Ch 2 – the professor

From his seat above the city, The Ruler watched in satisfaction as the world he had created functioned exactly as he had planned it to. The people moved blindly, their eyes unseeing. They did not know that they were all pawns in a bigger plan. They were as unassuming as newborn babies. The Ruler smiled to himself, allowing just a moment of awe at what he had achieved and created. And yet, he could see that something was coming that could undermine years of planning, ruin his perfect universe. This one spark in a greyscale world was his demise.

It had been three years since Leif had discovered The Nook. As he stepped towards the entrance, he could see a throbbing light emanating from the space. Worries immediately took a hold of his mind. Had he been reported? Had anyone seen him? Were they destroying the books that were his only hope in this world? There were spies everywhere, and you never knew if you could trust even your best friend. His whole body trembled from fear, but he mustered up the courage to chance a glimpse into the doorway. And what he saw was not a group of people in suits and dark shades, but a man with a long coat and sparkling glasses. Leif's foot crunched on some rocks underneath him, and the man whirled around, startled. His eyes darted frantically around, desperate to find the source of the noise. They landed on Leif, a scrawny boy standing in the doorway, and relaxed just a little. But the tension was still there, and the silence was so thick it felt as if it could be cut with a knife.

Before the man could register the boy in the doorway, Leif noticed something about the man that shocked him so much, it rattled his bones and sent shivers down his spine. His eyes. They sparkled incessantly, but that wasn't what had made Leif so startled, so scared. They contained all of his dreams, all of his desires. The stuff of nightmares and dreams. They held colour in their depths.

Leif's mouth was agape, but the man seemed unfazed, and not threatening at all, just merely curious. He stepped cautiously into The Nook. "Ah, I see you have found my little secret," the man said with amusement. "I have been collecting these books from dealers across the city for more than three decades. This is my humble collection. But I see, you must be wondering who I am. Call me the professor." Leif shook himself out of his stupor and found his voice. "My name's Leif." The Professor looked him up and down, as if calculating his worth. Leif shifted from leg to leg, feeling awkward and unnerved by this stranger. Wordlessly, he pointed a shaking finger at The Professor's eyes. "Is that...colour?" In his left eye was a fleck of something that Leif had never seen before. In the numerous books he had read, they had described this colour as a comforting presence, the feeling of having a steaming drink on a cold day, of warmth and happy memories that you thought about before you went to sleep. They called this colour brown.

“I can teach you about colour.” The professor’s voice burst through Leif’s thoughts. He was almost too eager to accept this offer, but managed to calm himself down. “Yes. I would love that. But first, tell me your story.”

### Chapter 3- The professor’s tale

“I was a young boy when I realised colour wasn’t just the stuff of legends, only it was a reality that nobody knew about. My mother bought a mirror when I was ten, and I was eager to see it. Mirrors were rare in my day. When I had a chance to glance at my reflection, I noticed there was something different about my eyes. I couldn’t quite pinpoint what it was, but I knew that what I had was special. Nobody around me pointed it out, so I thought I was hallucinating until I happened upon a half-ruined book that was laying on the pavement next to my house. I could only just make out the title. It was called Colour in a Colourless World, and it was as if an invisible force had drawn me to pick it up. I was intrigued, you see. I then realised what I had found, and raced home as fast as my legs would carry me, afraid for what would happen if I was found.

I read that book many times, and realised what had happened to my eye. I wasn’t going mad. There was just colour in my eye and everyone was too blind to see it. I realised that I had been born with a rare gift that I could harness to bring revelation to those around me. So after that I made it my life’s aim to collect as much information about colour as I could. I curated a community of people who also believed that colour existed. I thought I was the only one who could actually see it. Until I found you.”

There was a pause, and he continued his story. “One day about a month ago, I met up with one of The Ruler’s henchmen. He had told me that he had discovered something vital and very urgent. He was in our group, and we had been discussing quite recently to that why The Ruler had banned books on colour if it supposedly did not exist. We established that he was paranoid of people getting ideas about things that were not part of his grey utopia. That day, the henchman had been summoned to his personal chambers, but The Ruler was not in sight. He had searched the room for clues, and found instructions for a chemical formula named “The mist”. The henchman had snatched the document and resumed his unassuming position at the door, waiting for the arrival of The Ruler.

The document I now have in my possession contains his biggest secret. The answer to his relentless crushing of even the mention of colour, of putting people who believe in it in asylums and restricting even books about animals and plants. The Ruler wants to confine us in his version of a life with no imagination, a bland alternate to what could be. He wants to manipulate us, bend our reality to his liking. But now we have this document, we can stop this mess. End the suffering of the whole human race. Join me. Join this revolution, and together we can help change the world.”

With that, he extended his hand.

Leif had listened to this story intently, eating up every detail and analysing every scenario. He was desperate to give everyone the gift of colour, even if it meant putting everything that he had ever known at stake. He was ready for this and he knew it. He met the Professor's eyes and shook his hand. This was it. They were in this together now.

#### Ch 4 – The Mist

Curiosity was consuming Leif and he couldn't help but ask "What is The Mist?" The Professor replied, "You will find out soon enough, my dear friend. But for now, we will have to travel to find our fellow schemers." As they stepped out of The Nook and into the bustle of the city, Leif replayed everything that had happened that day inside his head. He was so close to actually being part of something greater, close to solving mysteries and lifting the shroud of lies that surrounded the earth.

The professor hurried through the city, taking shortcuts through deserted alleys and searching, always searching, for someone who might take unwanted attention in them. His eyes seemed to perform a dance of sparkles and his face told a story of determination. Leif had never ventured out of his district, so the journey was quite unfamiliar to him and they seemed to be going in circles. It was hard to tell where you were with all that grey. After what seemed like an endless trek through districts, The Professor stopped at a house which gave the appearance of being abandoned. It looked like the kind of place that had squatters, and Leif was uneasy. However, when he stepped inside the house he was met with a barrage of homely smells. A group of jolly people came to the door and started sharing jokes and news with the professor. It took at least three minutes before anyone noticed Leif standing awkwardly in the doorway.

The Professor introduced Leif. "Here is my newest recruit. We met at our little vault down at district nine. I then discovered that he could see colour, and here he is." At the last part, Leif could see that the group of people crowding the room stared at him more intently, as if trying to read his thoughts. "Uh, hello I guess" he said to break the silence. "Shall we tell the young chap about The Mist?" one person asked. The Professor nodded, and the air grew sombre as the henchman started telling Leif all about it.

"The Mist is a solution that The Ruler created to bend our idea of reality. It allows him to control everybody, but most importantly it is the reason we cannot see colour. The Mist is sprayed constantly over the atmosphere using special drones invisible to the naked eye. It destroys the colour receivers in our eyes and renders our brains susceptible to the propaganda that The Ruler tells us. However, there is a flaw in this formula. A very small minority of people are immune to it. The people that get locked up for thinking colour is real, well they are the ones who are immune. The Ruler has not found a solution to this yet, which puts us at a slight advantage. The Professor, Leif, you are the ones who have the most tolerance to The Ruler's power. You will be leading this operation."

## Ch 5 – Demise of The Ruler

The Ruler sat on his chair high above the city. As he watched the people and the machines working, he noticed something that sent his brain into a frenzy of anger. There was colour. Somewhere in his perfect world there was colour. The very thing that he had strived to eradicate had come back to haunt him. All his power was based on the dull grey world that surrounded him. How could this be happening?

The Ruler was so focused on this one spot that made his head go fuzzy with rage. He didn't notice the footsteps creeping up the stairs. He didn't notice a guard enter the room. He didn't see the crackling light that was wielded in their hands. And he wasn't prepared for his final breath, as he was touched with the blinding light. His body slumped to the ground, etched on his face were his last moments of fury, set in stone forever.

The world was silent. They knew something had changed. The world watched as the clouds parted to reveal hope. To reveal colour.

## Until Death Do Us Part by Tiana Nguyen

“Usque ad mortem nos partem (until death do us part),” I say, tightening my weak grasp around my brother, Fortis. I can feel his boney spine through his frail body, and I can hear his slow wheezing breaths – short and dry. We sit alone on the cracked, lifeless floor, without any nature in sight. No trees, no plants, no water. The only animals left are a few little beetles which had adapted to the dryness, though there weren’t enough beetles for the rest of our family. Fortis fiddles with the old tooth necklace our mother gave me before she had left.

She had always worn this necklace. It would frame her face so perfectly. Her long, tobacco brown hair would ripple so sweetly in the murky polluted air. Though all we could really smell was smoke; the essence of blossoming flowers and fresh mint followed her about. She was sublime, but also temporary.

As the days flew by, our scarce food sources began to decrease, and with no water, it became immensely hard for all of us to eat, and soon not all of us did. Each day, she became increasingly skeletal. I’ll never forget the way she had last spoke to us: “Usque ad mortem nos partem,” It was such a pure, trembling, and heart-shattering voice. As months passed, I’m still sunken with disbelief that she’s gone.

“Ignis,” Fortis soundlessly muttered, “I’m really hungry,”

I was hungry too. I inhaled the thin filthy air and slowly made my way to my feet, helping Fortis up as I go. I winced as I stood on all the cuts dealt by the barren and sharp ground. I wiggled my toes free of numbness and felt the hot grainy sand shift through the gaps. I turned my head to see the abandoned power plants that started all of this. I then averted my gaze towards Fortis, who had his split and splintered hand in mine. We slowly reached the large smoky orange rock where we forged for food. The boulder, massive, but not colossal, rose as I mustered up all of my strength to lift it up, although only a few insects were revealed. Not much else.

Across the desiccated valley, monstrous factories surge and memories start to flood my head of how it used to be. It all happened when I was 9 and Fortis 5, we are now 14 and 10. I can still visualise the thundering cloud of smoke that gushed out of the power plants. Days went by like this and we found that our water supply was decreasing, everyone’s supply was; the earth’s supply was. It started off small, just a few dried up puddles here and there, but then lakes started disappearing, rivers too. Soon enough, oceans started becoming shallow. Not only was the water reducing, but the number of animals and plants were too.

In this age, starvation and fatigue is unforgiving and cruel. We have barely seen anyone around our wasteland, and if we did see someone, they were securely holding death’s hand. I put my arm around Fortis, “usque ad mortem nos partem,” I say whilst running my hand through his thick matted hair.

Abruptly, we both hear a small voice in the far distance. Fortis and I sit dead still. We hear the voice again, louder this time. I pull Fortis closer to me - his heart beating through his chest. We hear the voice a third time, it belongs to a young boy, hoarse and weak.

We hear it once more,” help! Is anyone out there? Please!”

The fragileness in his voice shattered my heart - so helpless and so utterly scared. Out of instinct, I grabbed Fortis and ran towards the frail call. As we approached the cry, a figure started to form and in extremely poor condition too - malnourished and frail. If a little stick figure were to be walking around, there would be no difference.

Me and Fortis fell into a hurried walk as we came up to the young stranger. He seemed about the same age as me. His worn down and hole covered clothes were soaked, sweat trickling off them. I'm astonished about how he's still alive. Burns from the sun dotted his body, his skin as cracked and as dry as our surroundings.

"Help me. I beg of you, please," he wheezes. Fortis lets go of my hand and reaches out for his, he looks back at me with eyes filled with kindness and care.

"Ignis?" he asks, waiting for my approval to assist the sickened boy. I hesitantly nod, and lead the two of them back to our rock. Once we arrive, our unexpected guest falls to the ground. I immediately check his breathing and pulse, it's unbelievably slow, but just enough to keep living. I snatch a wondering beetle from the edge of the rock and squeeze it until it drips blood into the boy's dehydrated mouth.

A few blood-drained beetles later and he awakes. He wipes the beetle blood from his mouth and mutters out a weak "Thank you."

He tells us his name is Kaito. I analyse his hollow-cheeked face, and his skin-and-bones body.

"Where did you come from?" I ask him whilst handing him the dried beetles from before. He then responds with,

"All the way from the north. Everything is gone there, not a life in sight. I came here in search for water "

"Water?" this puzzles me, "but there isn't any water left anywhere?"

"Yes, there is! Over there!" Kaito exclaims, pointing into the far distance.

He informs us that in his old area, there was a rumour that somewhere in the southern direction, there is still a lake not yet dried up, although the people were too weak to ever venture that way.

"Ignis, Fortis," he wheezes out, "You two should come with me to find it!"

Fortis looks at me, unsure on what to do, though I'm not too sure either. I analyse Kaito once more. His knotted curly hair is sprinkled with dirt and sand, and his large walnut brown eyes filled with innocence and purity. His only intention is to help us, yet I'm still hesitant on whether we should go along on his journey.

Half of me thinks that we should stay here in our area. We've never left this place since the water disappeared. I lift up the rock once more to see how many bugs we have left, only 3. The other half of me thinks we should just go with him. It's an extreme risk to do this though. What if the rumour turns out to be false? We would have travelled for nothing then. Would we even have enough food?

"How long would it take to get to the lake?" Fortis asks, cutting off my train of thought.

"Well, I was told it was around 150 kilometres south. So around 1-2 days I'd say," He replies.

“Puto nos eamus, Ignis (I think we should go, Ignis),” Fortis whispers to me, “perituri sumus utrolibet modo, recte? (We are going to die either way, right?)”

He’s right. If we stay, we will die of hunger; if we start travelling and then die, then at least we will die trying.

I brush my hair out of my face and make eye contact with Kaito, “We will go with you, Kaito,” His face lights up with joy.

“Oh, thank you! Thank you for agreeing to come with me!” he happily laughs.

Since we don’t have many items to our name, we just grab the final three insects under the rock and start our journey south.

As we walk, all we can see is barren and split ground and the murky haze of the fire-filled air. Our skins have started flaking and peeling due to the intense heat and eyes have gone dry. Though we are starving, we put off eating. It feels as if we’ve been walking in place for endless hours but the sun gradually sets, covering the sky with a fluffy blanket of stunning and divine gradient of warm colours.

The sky eventually turns dark so we have our walking come to a pause. The three of us settle down in our distant area and try to rest, however I cannot and neither can Kaito. Him and I sit in silence, though it is soon broken by Kaito softly saying,

“What do you think happens when we die?” I look at Fortis, who has been quietly snoring on shoulder, and then I turn to look at Kaito, who has been tracing the cracks in the ground with his shaky and emaciated fingers.

“I’m not too sure what happens,” I whisper, “although, my only parting wish would be to go to the place where my mother is,” a gentle smile appears on his sun-tanned face.

“I believe that when you die, you are able to be reincarnated,” he looks up to the star speckled night, “when my time comes, I wish to be reincarnated as the sky,” I tilt my head in interest and he lets out a faint laugh,

“If I were the sky, then I would make it rain. I would make long heavy raindrops fall upon the earth, and I would turn the world back to blue again,”

I lightly smile, “that’s a pretty good wish.” I lie back and hold Fortis close. Kaito lies down too, and we slowly drift off to sleep to the sight of the glimmering stars above us.

I don’t know how many hours have passed, but I am awoken by the blinding rays of the sun. It seems as I was the last to wake up, for Fortis and Kaito are sitting across from each other and playing with the golden dusty ground. I rub my eyes clear and crawl my way over to them,

“Kaito,” I yawn, “how do you know when we’re close to the lake?”

“According to my family before they passed, surrounding the lake is cotton-soft sand which you can see shimmer and sparkle when the light turns gold,” he answers.

“That sounds beautiful,” I smile. After a short while of small talk, we decide to start walking again.

It seems as we walk on infinitely and our feet are now cut and blistered. Our limp walking slows down due to the agonising pain, Fortis stops walking entirely. He tumbles to the ground and softly cries.

“It hurts,” he mutters.

I instantly rush to the ground to comfort him and I hold him close. I look at the soles of his raw feet and they are glazed with ruby red blood. I look over to Kaito to see if he has any solutions, and it seems that he does. He takes off his rag-like shirt and tears it in half. I loosen my grasp around Fortis and let Kaito take lead. My scared little brother winces as Kaito wraps his strips of shirt around his bloody and beaten feet as some sort of bandage,

“Do you think you can walk, Fortis?” I ask, and Fortis pouts his lip and shakes his head, “I’ll carry you then,”

“I can carry him if you want,” Kaito offers, however I refuse,

“No, that’s alright. You’ve already helped him plenty, and thank you so incredibly much for that, but it’s my turn to be a big sister,” He smiles and nods, and we start walking again. At this point, we’ve all eaten our final bugs which we brought with us, in hopes to calm our rising hunger.

The sun travels across the sky, and it seems as if we’ve been walking in place once again. Fortis has calmly fallen asleep, but me and Kaito’s legs and feet throb in pain, and our voices turn gruff. Our weighted and parched breaths take over the silence around us before Kaito breaks it,

“Ignis,” he says, “would you like to know my true reasoning for this journey?” I slow down my walking to be in line with his,

“Of course, I would like to know,” I say through deep breaths,

“I have two brothers,” his voice turns shallow, “when all of us heard about the rumour, they wanted to go find it to see if it was real, just as we are now. They told me that if they found it, then they’d be waiting for me there until I got older. That was one year ago.”

I look at him uneasily. Has he known that this place wasn’t real all this time? Why would he go all this way if nothing is going to come of it? Regardless of these hesitant thoughts, he continues his story,

“Although they are most likely dead, I have this gut feeling that they aren’t,” he snuffles through light teardrops, “I just want to see them again,”

“I know exactly how you feel, Kaito. My mother was also determined to find a livable place, but she had died before she ever got the chance to look,” Him and I share sympathetic looks.

It eventually turns to night, and once again, it’s just me and Kaito awake. He still looks shaken by what he told me and so I ask if he’s okay,

“Yeah, I just miss them,” he stutters. Even though he says he’s alright, I can tell that he very much isn’t,

“You’ll get to see your brothers again. Whether it’s in this life or the next, I promise you that you will see them,” he turns to me with watery eyes,

“Promise?”

“Promise,” I pull him into a hug, I feel his spine through his burnt back and his rib cage through his sides. We let go of the embrace and stare into each other’s intricate eyes for what seems to be hours, but is

only a short moment; I smile, and switch my gaze to Fortis, who has been lost in a well-deserved slumber this entire time. I lay next to him and shut my eyes, “*usque ad mortem nos partem*,”

I wake early the next morning, the sun peeking out from the horizon. Fortis is still asleep but Kaito is sitting close by, watching the sun. I go sit next to him, occasionally sharing delicate looks and sweet smiles. As the golden sun shines over us, we see a sparkle and shimmer in the far distance. I chuckle and smile even wider at Kaito. If what he said is true, then we are almost at our destination. He turns to me, glowing with happiness,

“Almost there,” he half-whispers, running his hand through my wooden brown and knotted hair, putting it behind my ear. We continue to watch the sun cast its orange and yellow shimmer across the sky. Fortis then comes from behind us to sit next to me, and I put my arm around his pointy shoulders.

After the sun fully rose, we set off to finish our journey. The sweltering heat returned to follow us, although that didn’t stand in our way. My heart had been beating outside my chest as we -extremely slowly, but surely- approached our goal. However, my heart started beating for a different reason now; fear.

The glistening lake was just out of sight, but what blocked it was a colossal yet claustrophobic canyon that went on for what seems to be forever. I set Fortis onto his feet, and cautiously peer over the edge of the beast’s mouth. Nothing could be seen, but things could be heard. The threatening hiss of snakes echoed throughout the opening, stabbing us with dreadful horror throughout our spines. Some of them were slithering across the sides of the walls. I jumped backwards in fright and let out a small scream. Their scaly skin was flaky and rotten. Their eyes were glossy and whited out. You could see their bones through their scales too, and their jarring fangs stuck out over their jaws. They look as if they haven’t eaten or drunk anything in years, yet somehow, they are still living,

“They’re like zombies,” I say, securing Fortis in my arms. Kaito goes to have a look, but jumps back as I did. We all stand frozen in place,

“What do we do?” Fortis asks, hopping from sore foot to sore foot, helplessly staring up at me.

“We’ll have to jump,” Kaito and I say in sync. The distance between us and the other side was quite a few metres away, though one massive jump could make it,

“I don’t think I can jump that...” Fortis shakily utters. Suddenly, Kaito picks up Fortis and then sets him back down,

“If Ignis jumps first, then I could throw you over and she can catch you. You are incredibly lightweight so it may be possible,”

Those last few words worry me. ‘May be possible?’ I don’t want my little brother to fall to his death, especially when we are so close to the lake. I open my mouth to reject this idea, but Fortis speaks,

“As risky as this sounds, I think this is our safest choice, how else would I get over anyway?” he states. His fragile little hands grab mine, “Don’t worry, Ignis. *Usque ad mortem nos partem*,”

“*Usque ad mortem nos partem*,” I hesitantly repeat. After a quick moment of self-preparation, I hug Fortis then step back to have a run up.

“You better be a good thrower,” I sternly say while passing Kaito. He grins,

“I promise you we’ll make it,”

We put our foreheads together and I begin sprinting. I have never run faster in my life; I could hear my heart galloping outside of my chest. As I approach the ledge of the canyon, I take my leap of faith. I tightly squeeze my eyes shut, and before I know it, I tumble and roll onto the desolate ground. I spit the dust out of my mouth, and dizzily look back at Fortis and Kaito. I’ve made it. I quickly scramble my way back to the edge of the canyon.

“Ready!” I shout. I watch as Kaito picks up my precious brother and carefully chucks him across the deep abyss. I don’t quite catch him, but I do cushion his fall. The moment he sits up, I hold him tight and softly peck his forehead.

Now, it was Kaito’s turn. He takes a few steps back and starts sprinting. He jumps as he gets to the ledge, but he doesn’t jump far enough. He smacks his jaw on the ledge, but I grab his wrist just before he falls. Scarlet red blood drips from his mouth and into the void below. I pull him up so he can get a small grasp on the edge, although this is quickly undone as he feels two razor sharp fangs plunge into his left ankle. He screams and kicks his legs to fend off the terror filled reptile, which works, but he is now further into the canyon.

Fortis rushes to help, but I instruct him to stay back. I’m now on my stomach trying to haul Kaito up. He manages to grab my arm with both of his hands, though it becomes increasingly harder for me to help him.

“Ignis!” Kaito calls, “swing me to the ledge!” I start rocking my arm back and forth to gain momentum. Tsunamis of stress and worry overcome us. I have never had strong arms, so if I mess this up, then he could easily fall. With one final pained swing, I fling him up to the ledge. He manages to get his leg over, and Fortis dashes over to help me pull him to safety.

We pull and pull until he eventually makes it over, but he is still bleeding at an incredibly alarming rate. I cover the wound with both my hands to try to slow the flow down. My mind is a giant tornado-like mess. His blood seeps into the crevasses of my hands, and my eyes start to distressingly flood. Before I can react, Fortis takes my hands away and securely wraps what seems to be his shirt around Kaito’s ankle, like how he had done for him. Though it is still bleeding, it has slowed down significantly.

Kaito sits up, “thank you, Fortis,” he says, giving him a hug. He wipes the thin blood trail away from his mouth, and I hold him tight,

“Are you okay?!” I tremulously ask, wiping the tears from my eyes. He nods and attempts to stand up. Just as he is about to fall over, Fortis and I support him from both sides. He chuckles,

“Thank you, you two,” he smirks. We resume our slow path to our end point, shuffling our way there, little by little.

The sun is now watching us from behind. I’m then abruptly yanked down by Kaito collapsing. He tries to help himself back up, but shakily falls again.

“Kaito!” Me and Fortis shout, instantly come down to help, “what happened?!”

“Nothing,” he winces, “it’s alright, I just...tripped,” I look at him with furrowed eyebrows. What would he have tripped on? I check his injury and the blood stain is bigger than before. I look at him worriedly, and he seems to notice my concern,

“I’m okay, Ignis. Don’t worry,” he confirms. I uneasily sigh and pull him back up to support him. We continue to walk, slower this time so that none of us fall. The sky has turned a faint yellow colour; the sun’s heat no cooler than before. Our heads begin to ache and our vision starts to blur. We find a rock nearby, and decide to take one more break.

We all sit there panting, tiredly sitting against the orange-streaked rock. I look to the lake ahead, I estimate that it will take about 2 or so hours to get there, depending on how fast we walk. The glittering shine of the sand keeps my fiery hope alight. We all rest our voices too; our throats are parched and gasping. I rest my heavy head on the rock and close my weary eyes. I focus on the few sounds around me; Fortis and Kaito breathing and the hot wind blowing past us, although there is something else I can hear, but I can’t quite get a grasp on it. I narrow in on that sound, it’s like a sizzling noise, a whistle almost. I then quickly open my eyes in realisation, it’s a hissing sound, and it’s close. I hastily stand up, alerting Fortis and Kaito of the sound. I listen once more but Fortis confirms my suspicion by fearfully screaming,

“SNAKES! THEY’RE UNDER THE ROCK!!” It appears that there are multiple as four of the same monstrous snakes which bit Kaito slide out from under the rock.

We all instantly start running. Fear and worry overflow our minds. As I run, I hear a pained scream followed by a thud behind me. It’s Kaito. I skid to a stop, my heart beating faster than a watch can time. I look at Kaito and he is on the floor bleeding, with the snakes not far behind. I rush to go help him, but the snakes reach him just a split second before I do. One of them nips at his already bleeding ankle.

I manage to yank it off, and he lets out another agonising yell. I support him to his feet and start running as fast as I can, although with Kaito’s injuries, we’re not very fast. We’re barely out of reach from the hissing monsters. Fortis sprints over to help. With his assistance, our speed increases significantly. We all hurryingly limp away from the four terrifying snakes, and after an eternity of running, they are out of sight.

Our sprint eventually turns into a very slow walk, and our goal is now only a few metres away. Fortis walks ahead of us, even though he is extremely shaken by recent events, he is cheerfully bouncing with excitement. As we get closer, the hard and chalky floor turns into a cloud-like silky sand. A stunning shallow lake with boulders surrounding it.

The more we approach, the more we realise that there’s someone already there. Someone tall, with scruffy black hair, with the same big honey-brown eyes as Kaito. Kaito then comes to a sudden halt. He puts his hand over his dried mouth, smiling from ear to ear. His eyes sparkle with tears, and he lets out a breath-taken and shaky laugh.

I chuckle with him, “almost there,” I say. We all keep on walking, watching as the sky becomes a gorgeous pinky-orange gradient.

Finally, after all of our hardship, we accomplish our goal. We all smile with relief, we've made it! We all instantly run to stand in the clear refreshing water. Before I know it, Kaito is swept away from my support and into the figure's arms. Both of them crying, and telling each other how much they missed each other, but I notice that Kaito's voice is much more slurred and fainter than the other, who must be his brother.

After they finish reuniting, the tall adult turns to us, "Hello, I am Kyron. You two saved my little brother, thank you," he says gratefully. Me and Fortis smile at him. We all listen as he explains that their other brother had died due to poison which he got from a snake bite. Our eyes widen with panic,

"Was this snake dry and flaky, with blank eyes and really sharp teeth?" Fortis loudly asks.

"Yes," Kyron answers, "Why? What happened?"

His question is then suddenly answered by the splash of Kaito falling into the water, sending deep red spirals into its ripples. All of us fall to the lake's floor as well to help him. I rest his head on my legs, large fearful tears fill everyone's eyes.

"Kaito!" Kyron yells. Kaito drowsily turns his head towards him,

"Brother..." he whispers, smiling with dull and hazy eyes. He then turns to me, "Ignis, you didn't break your promise," he turns back to Kyron but continues talking to me, "I got to see them again," I run my hand through his swirly hair, like he did with me,

"Kaito please, you have to stay. We just got here!" I sob. It feels as if I'm being drowned in emotions. His blood runs through my trembling hands.

"My brother, it was so good to see you again, I love you so incredibly much," he says in Japanese, and his brother says it back through tears. He touches Kyron and then Fortis's face, giving them a warm and joyful smile,

"Don't go..." Fortis mutters, wiping tears from his eyes.

"It'll be okay," Kaito says whilst patting his head. He then turns to me and we touch foreheads once again. I cling onto him tightly, and Kyron holds his hand too. He whispers to me, "Until next time, Ignis,"

"Until next time, Kaito," I softly say. He then looks up to the orange and red sky,

"Until death do us all part!" he lovingly voices, before gently closing his eyes and slipping out of Kyron and I's hand. We all sit in the water flooded with grief. Kyron picks up his cold brother and holds him close, weeping and crying in the process. I hug Fortis and he wraps his skinny arms around me. The only sounds we make are the sorrowful sniffles of our tears.

We decide to bury him next to where his other brother was buried, right next to a massive rock which had beautiful beige, orange and pink streaks in it. We sat in silence accompanied by tears which wouldn't stop falling.

After staying in this forever-lasting moment, massive grey clouds crowd above us. The sky turns a deep rich blue colour, unlike any sky I've seen before. I look up at the foggy sky, and a long and heavy droplet of water quickly falls down my cheek. I gasp. Another drop falls, and then another! Kyron and

Fortis notice it too. Small smiles start to bloom on our faces, it was raining! I think back to what Kaito had told me the first night of our journey,

“I wish to be reincarnated as the sky,” he had said. A warm disbelief flowers in my chest. I hug Fortis as tightly as I can, and spin happily around. Kyron notices my extreme joy,

“Did he tell you his wish too?” he says grinning widely, I nod, and he puts his arm around me.

“Death has not parted you from us yet, Kaito,” I blissfully whisper. I close my eyes and embrace the delicate rain.

# Donny Destruction by Myren Furi

## BREAKING NEWS! DONCASTER MALL TO BE DESTROYED!

Westfield Doncaster, a popular recreation place for children and adults alike, is set to be taken down in 2024. Scentre Group, the 50% shareholders of Westfield Doncaster, has decided to take down the mall because of a loss in interest in the mall and its shops in the last 4 years.

During March 2018, the mall was at its peak interest for shoppers, with record foot traffic statistics being broken each day. However, when COVID-19 struck, things began to go downhill. With lockdown enforcements, and students and adults being forced to work from home, people couldn't visit the mall anymore.

This caused the mall's financial state to go into a rapid decline. With no frantic shoppers flooding the mall, rushing to buy Christmas gifts, no gleeful students coming in after a tiring week at school, the mall lost the magic touch that it once had.

The Scentre group, owners of the mall, are going to be tearing the mall down sometime early next year, with hopes to sell the land to Summit. Their plan is to make more apartments at the top of Doncaster Road. "It was a gut wrenching decision, but it had to be done," says Scentre Group owner, Elliot Rusanow.

## Shadow-walkers by Josie Mander

The rain was falling. Slashing against the windows like hail, except there was none on the dry, ashen fields that welcomed the floods. He came. She had told him to leave but he came nonetheless. She glared and turned away, facing the floor now as to not see his face. He spoke. He told her to go to the dungeons. He told her there was fate lying, waiting for her.

She refused. He started to speak but she silenced him. She sent him out. Her kids couldn't have her dead. They barely got enough of her alive.

Her body was fading. Her mind was giving way. Someone else would have to carry the burden. But not her children. They were too young. They had their own problems. They were growing stronger. They were beautified by the darker shadows embracing the lighter ones as their own children.

She takes them into her arms, crying for no particular reason. They don't question her tears, her face of grief. They know her a lot. Almost too much.

They grow up too fast. Their bodies stronger, their minds aging by the second. She does everything, but they are slipping through, soon to be gone completely. Only then would she release all the breaths she'd been holding for them. All the purpose of living thrown away with them, travelling to faraway lands.

\*

The rain dries up as her tears do too. She knows herself to exist only for them and the rain. She slumps with as much dramatic effect as she can muster for her children. They laugh and run off, playing some sort of silly childish game. She wants to go back, be with them and see how their minds cope while hers can't. She could if she wanted to, but it's not right. Not a heroic move at all. Not like the old days.

Maybe it's because they are gone, not really here anyway. They exist to a foreign land. They have their own language and games they play, their own powers almost completely opposite to hers, though she took them in. They learn under her supervision, play under her watch and sleep under her songs. They love her, not knowing their unplanned future, not worrying about the pull of tomorrow or the push of yesterday. Not thinking about the price of a simple smile, or the thoughts of a trade between two.

She called him back.

Break The Link by James Rogers

“George!” Oh no, I’m in trouble. “Get down here now!” I trudge downstairs, just waiting for Mum to scream at me for... well it could be a lot of things actually. Just before I come round the corner, Mum shout for me to come down again. “What is this?” Ah, grades. “You got a D- in science, C in maths, E in English, and a D in Music!” AH, give me a break! “Mum, are we just ignoring the fact that I got an A+ in PE and art?” Oh, shouldn’t have said that. “I didn’t pay for the Neuralink 98, for you to get an E?” The stupid Neuralink, why does everybody have them? Someone could probably hack mine with all the hacking skills in 2573. I hate it. Apparently it “enhances cognitive ability”, it just makes us more boring. But I need it if I what a job.

\*

Another day walking to school. At least I have my AirPods 568. Ah, green light! REEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE. What has happened to my AirPods? BANG! I’m in a daze but I’m able to figure out that one of my AirPods exploded. It all happened so fast! Soon after, I blacked out.

\*

I wake up with a doctor and Mum nearby. I must be in a hospital. “Ah, You’re awake George! So do you remember anything?” I mumble that one of my AirPods exploded in my ear. “I have some good news, and bad news. The good news is you’ll be all right! The bad news is, Your Neuralink is destroyed.” Bad new? Ha, that’s amazing news! “So we can replace it, but it would wipe out a lot of your memory.” Strait away, Mum says to replace it, but the doctor says that it’s up to me. I think about it, for about five seconds. “Take it away.”

# The White Room by Aydreaanne Wong

A yellow and pink pill. Something to be consumed once daily, at exactly 7:30 am. It kept people in control, no drunk drivers out at night, no one to rob a bank, no crimes.

The year was 3045. Displaying emotions was illegal. Punishable by death. It was written in the Constitution of the Kingdom. No longer United. That part was removed in 2098, due to a raging war since 2094.

The war made the government broke, so they released a drug called Austidite that would cause people to experience extreme emotions, comparable to manic episodes. Of course, the people didn't know this. The feeling was never accurately described because emotions were no longer a thing; it was just a matter of subjectiveness. The argument was that happiness and sadness were no longer considered realistic feelings.

The prime Minister of the Kingdom was an old, seemingly invincible man, who no one knew the name of, he was known only as NR. He lived his happy life in his mansion, and ate only from pure gold plates and cutlery.

No one ever dared to argue with or question NR's antics. NR hated almost everything. He hated emotions, he hated health, he hated tv shows, he hated books, he hated art, you can imagine the rest of the list. He spread propaganda about all of these things with messages informing the population that it would make their brain rot or melt out of their ears.

NR strongly believed he was right, and refused to accept or even listen to other opinions that weren't the same as his. Therefore, Austidite was introduced to get rid of emotions, to brainwash people. All forms of art were banned, including music, paintings, films, and books (textbooks were the only exception).

All food was the same, nothing like what you would have now, no hamburgers, pizza, donuts, ice cream, the only form of food was this tasteless white mush, the same thing for breakfast, lunch and dinner, 365 days, for as long as you live.

Everything was controlled, what you learnt in schools, what you were allowed to discuss, even the media, especially the media. The only person who was allowed to report the news was NR himself, on giant screens plastered everywhere, at exactly 6:30 pm. In the beginning, those who protested, or made any comment opposing NR were shot on the spot.

People didn't even try anymore.

Until they did.

\*

Round, hazel- coloured eyes opened, slowly adjusting to their surroundings. Sighing against her silk bed sheets, she rolled out of bed, and went to take her pills. Emerson Jones lived a peaceful life. She was a lawyer, who sent people who didn't take their Austidite to the prisons. Most prisoners went to jail for

crying, or feeling sadness, the emotion that NR detested the most. Anger and Joy were far more easily detected, and if you were found experiencing those, you would be shot instantly.

Emerson was one of the lucky people to get a job like a lawyer, which was highly sought after as it provided you with a life of luxury. Most lawyers felt what used to be described as 'guilt' when they put people behind bars.

"You know what's funny?" Chris the bartender, a man who Emerson had become rather fond of, looked up from where he was crafting a margarita.

"What?"

He topped the glass with a little pink umbrella. Before handing it to Emerson. "I've never had a dream before, but if I did, I feel I wouldn't be able to distinguish the dream world from reality. Do you dream?" Chris looked at her curiously, not the reaction she had expected.

"Yes, I do dream. But I don't think it would be strange if you did not." Emerson said, sipping on her margarita. They kept talking about dreaming, and the world around them for at least a good half hour.

"I have to show you something." Chris said, grabbing Emerson's hand, and pulling her towards the door, before swinging it wide open. The world as she knew it was fading, colours dimming.

"You're seeing the true nature of reality," Chris said, answering her unsaid question.

"This can't be real. I wanna get out." Emerson gasped, frantically. "Shh. You have to see this, you have to understand," Chris whispered.

"How am I seeing this?" Emerson asked, starting to calm down.

"It's an antidote. I put it in your drink when I was making it. The world you live in isn't real. It's a simulation, you're merely a pawn in a government's game. They pollute your brain, along with everyone else's. And the food you eat, how can you even call it food? Have you ever had a burger?"

As Chris explained he knew she would simply forget.

The world was no longer a place painted in bright primary colours, deep blues, vibrant reds, bright yellows. Artificial grass, faux flowers made out of plastic, because the air was so full of chemicals. Trees were now holograms from the deforestation that had taken place prior to the war. Of course, Emerson didn't know that. Nobody knew.

All people born before the change (with the exception of NR) had their memories of life before the war wiped, No one knew what happened before, only that NR was a great hero who saved them all and restored peace in the community. Most of the war was fought through drones, and robots who also controlled submarines. The submarines had to be controlled by robots since these days the ocean was made of trash. Not that Olive or anyone else being brainwashed ever saw this version of the ocean. To them, the ocean was a bright blue water, with little fish that would swim around your feet.

Little mundane tropes that humans once took pleasure in were now too dangerous. Most were designated toxic wastelands. Instead, as the colours faded away before her eyes, the world Olive knew as her reality was now a cold, dark, and depressive place. Everything was black and grey, blue and white.

Emerson looked around, but the bar was now a dusty warehouse. Skeletons and bones were melded with cobwebs, dust, leaves, and rats scurrying about. It smelled of rotting corpses. People that bled for their cause. Death at its finest.

“Hello?!” Emerson’s words echoed back loudly, she winced, covering her ears. Nobody answered. Not that she expected anyone to, it seemed as though she was the only person around. Walking outside it looked almost identical to the bar.

A large bomb crashed into the building in front of her and exploded. Any ‘people’ ran off, they paid her no mind and were intent on helping themselves. She ran up to one of them, asking for help, but the people just ignored her and continued to run away.

The scene of the war faded to an empty white room, with a baby in a woman’s lap. She was weeping quietly, gazing at the baby, which upon looking closer at, was dead. “Hey! Miss, you can’t cry, they’re gonna come get you!” Emerson said, trying to warn the woman. “They can’t hear you.” Chris said, as he appeared behind Emerson, as the scene faded and she was back standing in the bar.

“Why did you show me that? It isn’t real. You drugged me!” Emerson accused Chris. “I gave you an antidote so you can see the world for what it truly is. So that you won’t be brainwashed like the others.”

“Can you see what I see?”

Chris shook his head. “I’ve been taking the antidote for a while; NR’s little tricks won’t work on me.” “Why did you pick me?” Emerson asked. Chris didn’t respond. Instead, he said “I want you to think back to when you were a child. Did your parents seem different to you?”

“I don’t know. Different from what?” “I need you to think about it,” Chris said, ignoring her question.

Emerson closed her eyes. She was born two years before the war, but she couldn’t remember much of her life before it occurred. Her’s parents were Ellie & James, both artists, were shot and killed for protesting NR shortly after her tenth birthday.

Before the war, James would often just sit in his favourite black leather chair and cry. Sometimes for days on end. His face became swollen bright red and blotchy. The blues of his eyes were dimmer, no longer his energetic self.

Emerson did not understand what was happening at the time, both being a child and never knowing what an emotion looked like. One day James abruptly stopped crying and simply began to stare at the wall, rocking back and forth in his chair.

Ellie on the other hand slowly went crazy.

One day James believed there was a plot to have them murdered by the government for knowing too much. He believed that the memory wipe had not worked on either of them.

James was not wrong. Yet the government did everything in its power to stop anyone from finding the truth.

“How are they different?”

“You don’t see it?” Chris asked. “No, please tell me,” Emerson said, confused.

“You have a chip in your wrist that prevents feeling,” Chris pointed down at her right wrist to which Emerson hid in her pocket.

“You’re mad! I don’t have any chip. I would’ve felt it. You would think I’d remember if they implanted a chip in my wrist for goodness sakes.”

Chris sighed. Can’t say you would have. The government did it at some point whenever you got anesthesia, flu shots, blood tests. Anything involving a needle or an IV they took advantage of to implant the chip in your arm.”

“Can’t you take it out?” Emerson asked “I would if I could. I can promise you that. It’s not that simple, people die from trying to do it. I got lucky and didn’t have one.”

“I would die if it meant saving people from this.

“So you believe me then?” Chris said, amused. “Not exactly but I don’t think I have a choice, do I?” Emerson said, exasperated.

“Nope.”

Emerson continually took the antidote after that. She never remembered the previous day. The chip was constantly wiping her memory.

One day, she couldn’t get out of the white room. No pictures showed up. No memories or flashbacks. She banged against the ‘walls’ frantically.

“Hello?! Chris? Help me!” As she screamed, she felt an emotion for the first time. “No no no no. This isn’t real!”

And with that, a small trickle of salty liquid spilled out of her eyes. Tears. She quickly wiped them away but it was too late. A moment later, people barged in to take her away. Crying, sadness, an emotion detested by NR. This was a big crime. The emotion was too noticeable.

## Runt of the Litter - Kara Tan

Pandora scurried towards the rusty old television that had laid upon the wrecked hall in the middle of the wasteland. Torment as usual. The perfects genetically modified, the perfects, their genetically modified genes of perfect abilities and in addition of their dictator, who cared less for Pandora's people, as if they were weak, tiny and lifeless ants. It was another day for the wasteland, with no power, no access to any 'perfect resources' and Pandora could only stand there and watch. Was this their destiny, to live in a world with no life to live? Pandora didn't dare to confront those outside the wasteland gates. With their pristine buildings, and spotless streets, followed by one supreme ruler, Pandora was only there to only watch for those 'perfects' could practically do anything to them.

The next day shone across the dusty landscape, and the TV blurred, shaking the rusty town hall. It had been there ever since the building was brought upon the lands. With the dictator screaming through the blaring and screeching device, as something disastrous had been created through the overgrowth of those 'perfects' technology.

"THE POWER SHOT!" The dictator shouted and his followers rejoiced. "It grants another great power to upgrade our metropolis of a land. Our perfect utopia will shine through, and will shine brightly against the lands, just like the sunshine!"

Pandora and her friend, Cozbi, a chill yet quite shady friend, was Pandora's only trusted ally that lived with her and shared experiences with her but yet so mysterious. The two gasped at the sight of more corrupted power, as the crowd excitedly cheered for the dictator's name. "What could we ever possibly do?" Pandora shouted in protest as their cheers would fuel her anger. "Why would they even do this? Not even sharing a taste of abilities that Pandora's people could die for?"

Cozbi slowly agreed, still suspiciously glancing from side to side, as if someone was slyly watching, if an assassin or a murderer was carefully watching their every move. Though Pandora didn't quite seem to care, her outlying traits was what made her special. 'What could she do, if this horrible injection would seem to modify every possible modified person in their perfect society, would it affect their entire system? Was it possible that she could somehow change the formula of this 'Power Shot', and soon change the personality of every single horrible 'perfect person' that lived in that horrible place?'

Soon a devilish thought influenced her head, a thought so sly, so evil that it couldn't get out of Pandora's head. It sure wasn't nice, to be fair, but Pandora's people were seen as little ducks waiting to be shot by a rifle. It was time for revolution.

## **Trapped Behind borders by Odette Roberts**

Prologue:

I sit and stare at the water's edge, its bright blue twinkle catching my eye, caught in the sunlight. A great contentment steals over me as I dip my feet into the lukewarm water. I'm free! I look over my right shoulder and these happy and tranquil feelings I had a second ago vanishes like storm clouds passing over the sun, threatening to drown it, to never be seen again. Where is she!? My heartbeat racing 100 miles an hour, I jump up to my feet, get my rucksack, and follow these scrape marks that hadn't been there a second ago. Agitated, my pace gets faster, and a horrible feeling comes over me. We were done for. These negative feelings wash over me, and I lose my focus and trip on the gravelly, dusty footpath. The last thing I see is my blood in front of me, an agonizing pain wash over me, then everything goes black.

Main story:

I gaze around our calm, isolated little village, riding my bike as fast as I can to make it in time for curfew. If I don't make it home by 8:00, my mum will get a huge fine of \$500. The gleaming, spotless road glints in the dull light of the street lamps, everything rushing past as my heartbeat increases due to the effort to make it home in time. Sweat beads down my forehead and trickles past my eye, my hands slick against the rubber handlebars. I approach my house, with a perfectly trimmed lawn alongside a modern, pristine house, a duplicate of all the houses around it. I rush to put my bike in its stand and hurriedly open the door, and as soon as I cross the threshold my mother rushes to greet me, worried but angry, hands on her hips.

"Where have you been, Alfie? I've been worried sick!" I hang my head in shame, guilt coursing through me. "I was hanging out with Bea, mum, her dad is in hospital and she's not permitted to see him! Why isn't she allowed to visit?" Mum sighs, looking downcast. "Alfie, you're not old enough to realise how biased our

world is. 20 years ago, Joseph de Bidette placed lots of corrupt and prejudiced laws in place to seek vengeance on his ex-wife, who ran away to another place to join her boyfriend. He stopped anyone going in or out the gates without his permission and placed strict laws on all females, such as they can't visit hospitals and go to school. We just have to accept this until we have a different governor." Mum claps her hands briskly and says, "Ok Alfie, time to get ready for bed! I'll come tuck you in once you're ready." I troop upstairs, get into my plain red pajamas, and as soon as my head hits my pillow, I spin into sleep, into this blissful state where I am free, fearless, not bound any longer by these laws.

## Chapter 2:

"Alfie, come down to meet Bea, I'm going to take you to visit her dad in the hospital".

I'm jolted out of sleep as my mother's loud voice slices across my dream, waking me up. I pull on some pants and a windcheater, hastily gulping down my few mouthfuls of wheat grain cereal and race down to my front courtyard where Bea is waiting, tapping her foot anxiously against the concrete footpath. She runs to meet me, and breathlessly says, "Come on, Alf, we have to go! Dad's worse!" We race down to Mum's white, spotless car and jump in, and I notice Bea is starting to shake, and I silently will mum to hurry up. At last, she jogs out of the house, hops in to the driver's seat, and the car silently purrs down the driveway. Mum looks back at us and says, "are you ready?" I swallow, and say, " ready".

We drive up to the big, grand hospital, built out of quartz and marble, meant to signify wealth. I don't understand why we have to waste resources on lots of fancy buildings, let alone hospitals. One day we might even run out of resources, thanks to Joseph's pointless drive to be the wealthiest town in the area, even if nobody ever comes in or out. I'm jerked out of my thoughts as we come to a stop, right outside of the hospital, and mum says, "good luck, Alfie, you can do this". I trudge

up to the double French doors, the entry to the hospital, and ask a nurse there where David Allens is. The nurse replies: “take the lift up to floor 6, and go to room 56. He should be there. If not, come back down to me. He points in the direction of an elevator and I follow his directions, and come to a halt outside room 56. I swallow, a lump forming in my chest, and slowly open the door with a creak, and lying in a bed across the room is Bea’s dad David. He’s looking straight ahead of him, a blank look on pale, sickly face. Machines beep around him, and a doctor is sitting in a chair across from him, a clipboard in hand. The doctor looks up when I enter the room, and I say, “Hi, I’m Bea’s friend, Alfie, I’ve come to see her father, David.” The doctor stands up from his chair, his eyes moist, and says, “He died in the night, Alfie, there was nothing we could do. He had stage 4 cancer, and we didn’t have the right resources to save him.” My mind was numb, I couldn’t think. Tears welled up in my eyes, blurring my vision. Grief washes over me like a tidal wave, threatening to drown me. I feel sadness not only for David, but for Bea. Her dad was the most important thing to her, and now he’s gone. Bea has no parents now. An orphan. Then my grief turns into anger. They could’ve saved him if they had the right treatments, but the border was closed. I clench my fists in. In the midst of hatred for Joseph Bidette, I silently bid my last goodbye to David, and slowly walk out of the doors to break the news to Bea.

Bea and I sit in my room in silence, and tears roll down her cheeks. My hand is on her shoulder to comfort her, and grief is thick in the atmosphere, making it hard to breathe. After a long pause, Bea whispers, “It’s not fair. Why can’t we live in freedom? Why couldn’t I say my last goodbye to dad? I wish we could escape this town.” I actually contemplate this, and after a couple of minutes say, “What’s stopping us from escaping?” Bea and I exchange looks, and agree. We stay up all night making plans. We were going to escape via the woods, and sneak under a hole under the boundary wall, into the moat, and swim to safety. I was going to bring the bag with clothes, sleeping bags, tents and torches whilst Bea was going to

take lots of food and water.

I lay wide awake on my bed, staring up the ceiling, worry gnawing at me. How would I say goodbye to Mum?

Bea and I wake up to light filtering through my window, the amber rays soaking the room. But the weather is opposite to my mood. I write a long, meaningful note to mum and leave it on the dining table for mum to find when she comes home from work. For the next few hours Bea and I gather all our resources, and it's three o'clock when we set off. My feet are already aching by the time we reach the forest. I glance back at our town, and my house for the last time, swallowing back tears. I think about my dad that died of the same cancer David did. I think about mum, about my school friends, Joseph Bidette, and our miserable life. I shake my head, ridding these thoughts, and set off into the slowly dying sun, into a new life, a happy, joyful life.

My feet are dragging, and my back aches by the time Bea suggests we set up the tent for the night. With a relieved sigh, I take my rucksack off my back, and set the tent up. We have a quick dinner of bread and butter, have a small sip of water, and crawl into our sleeping bags. I quickly drift off to sleep.

I'm awoken in the middle of the night by helicopters flying overhead, and immediately I bolt upright, and shake Bea awake. Terror courses through my veins. What if the military were looking for us? What if they found us? With absolute certainty I knew mum wouldn't have split on us. She's said hundreds of times she wanted a better life for me. All I wish for is that we took her with me, but I knew she wouldn't leave her parents and siblings. Bea and I lay wide awake until the buzz of helicopters wears off. I breathe a sigh of relief, and thank the stars that our tent wasn't seen. After a while, my eyes close to pitch darkness once again.

I wake up to birds chirping, and for a moment I'm confused: Where am I? Then everything flashes back to me, like a far-off memory. Of course, Bea and I are

escaping the town. We're right near the crack in the border, it seems someone didn't patch it up on purpose. I dread swimming in the water, but luckily, I remembered to bring bathers and towels. Bea and I eat a quick breakfast of some fruit, pack up the tent, and go on our way again. We reach the crack in the border, and just manage to squeeze through, and... fall into the clear, cold, gushing water. Bea and I just manage to hold the rucksacks above our heads as the water goes over us. I resurface, gasping for air, and wait with bated breath, for Bea to resurface. Thankfully, a short heartbeat later, her head breaks the surface of the water, and we swim to the dirt bank, scrambling up it. I pass her a towel, and we change back into our regular clothes.

While I wait for Bea, I finally take a moment to gather my surroundings. I draw my breath with awe and wonder when I realise all the colours are much brighter, fresher. Bright rays of sunlight dance through the forest, dappling the lush, green trees and grass. Bright colours are everywhere, fruit on trees, and bushes full of vibrant flowers and berries. Birds flit in and out, gliding through the air, sunlight sparkling on their neon feathers. This place is alive with animals and plants, and the earth itself seems to be a living, breathing thing. Bea emerges, and like me, she surveys the scenery with amazement and awe. We spend half of the day lazing about, and eating fruit, that tastes like nothing I've ever tasted, sweet, juicy, and fresh, the flavours seeping over my tongue. I can barely bring myself to keep walking, but I know this place isn't where I want to live. I want to keep venturing until we reach civilization.

Bea and I trudge on and on, and another day has passed, but it's all been worth it. I decide for us to have a break, and dump our bags down in the long, succulent grass. I walk along the shrubs a bit and part a curtain of ivy to... a beautiful lake, sparkling under the sun's bright glare. I sit and stare at the water's edge, its bright blue twinkle catching my eye, caught in the sunlight. A great contentment steals over me as I dip my feet into the lukewarm water. I'm free! I look over my right

shoulder and these happy and tranquil feelings I had a second ago vanishes like storm clouds passing over the sun. “Bea!” I call out, frantic. “Where are you?” My heartbeat racing 100 miles an hour, I jump up to my feet, get my rucksack, and follow these scrape marks that hadn’t been there a second ago. Agitated, my pace gets faster, and a horrible feeling comes over me. We were done for. These negative feelings wash over me, and I lose my focus and trip on the gravelly, dusty footpath. The last thing I see is my blood in front of me, an agonizing pain wash over me, then everything goes black.

My eyes flit slowly open, and as my vision adjusts, I notice I’m in a strange room, with people looking at me anxiously, worry clouding their eyes. Suddenly, I’m filled with fear. Did they find us? But I notice the room is unfamiliar, and Bea is also sitting in a chair across from me, watching me with a concerned gaze. I slowly sit upright, and say, my words slurred, “Where am I? what happened?” Bea responds:

“I’d wandered off, and was lost, and these natives from another village found me and brought me here. You’d fallen over and were unconscious for a couple of hours until the natives found you. Oh Alfie, I’m so glad you’re alright!” I grin. It was all worth it to reach somewhere I felt safe. My head throbbed, but I didn’t care. This is my home now. I finally belong.

Epilogue: 1 year later

I frolic and splash around in the water, feeling happier than ever reflecting on my past life in our town. The natives were kind and fed us, and gave us shelter in return for a bit of our labor to construct shelters and gather food. I had lots of friends in the village. Life was peaceful and happy, and I felt content, but I did miss my mother. I knew she wanted a better life for me, and I hope she's doing fine without me. But I would never go back under Joseph's bitter rule. Now I finally felt like I belonged. I feel safe, and happy, and now I'm home at last.

THE END



# Blurb

Students from Koonung Secondary College and East Doncaster Secondary College have written a collaboration of short stories for you to enjoy. Have you ever wondered what it would be like to live in a post-apocalyptic world? If pets were in control? How would you perceive a universe without colour or survive if your world was consumed in a drought? What would happen if your favourite shopping mall was being destroyed? Your questions will be answered in this compilation of stories from both schools, helping you find out everyone's perspectives on what a dystopian world looks like.

## A sneak peek at these wonderful stories!

Happy World. Too many people have depression, But the scientists have made a new happy pill! How well do the happy pills work? Should the citizens trust this new invention?

Corrupt. Everyone is mad at the government because of high taxes. How can the citizens fix this problem of government corruption?

Zombies. I say she lives in a "perfect world" A zombie apocalypse happens! Perfect, something different. What bad things are going to happen next?

Exotron. 11:14 Past curfew! Scared and out of her mind. Open to all the bad things that happen. Will she get caught or will she face the consequences?

Anthology of Dreads of Dystopian Multiverse. Leaping into earth, Dystopias is taking over the world! More and more are coming in as we speak. Can we take "dystopia action"?

## About the Authors

Jarrad Lim

Jarrad is a 13-year-old from EDSC with a love of gaming. He enjoys consuming Asian food as it is his favourite type of food. He plays the clarinet and loves reading. His short story was inspired by Japanese culture.

Milano Zhang

Milano Zhang is a 12 year old who has a mediocre love for reading. He loves going outside.

Aakif Mahamud

Aakif is a twelve year old who likes sports such as soccer, basketball and cricket. Aakif also enjoys reading.

Shi-Han Huang

Shi-Han is a 12-year-old and is an avid reader. She loves the outdoors and nature. She is an INFJ personality.

Rosie Chong

Rosie is a twelve year old. She likes reading, and prefers fiction. She has three younger siblings; two sisters and one brother, and she also plays badminton.

Noah Chan

Noah is a twelve year old boy who likes reading fiction books. He enjoys playing chess, among other things.

Joshua Chow

Joshua is a twelve year old from EDSC. he likes to eat Thai food, and his aunt once tried to sacrifice him to a pelican. He plays the tuba and likes to swim.

Kara Tan

Kara is a 12-year-old from Koonung who continuously talks about controversial political topics. Communism inspired her dystopian stories. She lives under a rock.

Leon Yu

Leon is thirteen years old and goes to EDSC. He has several English achievements such as two ICAS medals. He likes to write narratives, and his favourite colour is red.

Ayden Hou

Ayden is twelve years old, turning thirteen. He likes to play basketball and he likes breathing.

Ryan Lo

Ryan is twelve years old, enjoys playing basketball and sleeping.

Sahil Patwardhan

Sahil is a 12-year-old student from EDSC and enjoys playing Table Tennis, Cricket, Badminton and he enjoys reading fantasy books. He moved to Melbourne from Adelaide when he was seven. He was a Milgate student in Primary School.

Aydreanne Wong

Aydreanne is a 13-year-old student from Koonung. She enjoys playing the drums and she is in the SEEK program (extended academic work).

Aanya Rajput

Aanya is a 12-year-old student from EDSC. She enjoys doing weekly Gymnastics and Swimming classes. She enjoys art. Her favourite author is Enid Blyton and she enjoyed reading Hive.

Odette Roberts.

Odette is a 13-year-old student from Koonung. She does dance and tennis outside of school. She likes Pizza and Dogs. She was lightly inspired by The Giver in her Dystopian story.

Gemma Roberts

Gemma is a 13-year-old student from Koonung. She rates basketball 8/10. The Giver inspired her Dystopian short story.

Leona Loh-Hermans

Leona is a 12-year-old student from EDSC. She enjoys swimming, and is a State and National swimmer. Her dog inspired her short story.

Moksha Iyer

Mokasha is a 13-year-old student from Koonung. She enjoys playing sports and loves to draw comics. She has 2 stick insects.

Greta Bonello

Greta is a 12-year-old student from EDSC. She enjoys English class.

Leo Al-Ali

Leo is a 12-year-old student from Koonung. He wants to make a business when he's 18 and likes learning about money. Andrew Tate inspired his story.

Tijana Rakic

Tijana is a 12-year-old student from EDSC. She wants to swim in the Olympics and likes spending time with family and friends. Her story was created purely from her imagination.

Adveka Thurairajah

Adveka is a 12-year-old student from EDSC. She plays basketball and likes to read. She has no pets, but wants a dog. She's from Sri Lanka.

Myren Furi

Myren is a 13-year-old student from Koonung. He enjoys Football (Soccer). He was trying to be funny in his interview. He once got 28 kills in a Fortnite game and he once botched making Mac and Cheese.

Edmunda Lim

Edmunda is a 13 year old student who likes movies and crime. She crochets toys. She lies.

Nevie Crouch

Nevie is a 12-year-old student from Koonung. She does Basketball. That's all she would say.

Sophie Newbury

Sophie is a 13-year-old student from Koonung. She Dances. That's all she would say.

Lilla Buchanan

Lilla is a 12-year-old student from Koonung. She also Dances. That's all she would say.

Rayan Chabchoul

Rayan is a 13-year-old student from EDSC. He is interested in English and Humanities. He has a brother. He plays tennis and tennis.

Elanor Gould

Elanor is 13 years old. She likes drawing and reading. She also lived in South Africa for 9 years.

Tiana Nguyen

Tiana is a 13-year-old student in Koonung secondary college. She enjoys drawing and has a dog named Bones. She also plays piano and guitar.

Oscar Kuiper

Oscar is a 13 year old EDSC student. He plays video games and wears glasses. He can see without glasses. Slightly.

Darron Wang

Darron enjoys grinding Fortnite.

Shirley Lei

Shirley is a 12-year-old student at EDSC. She plays violin, soccer and badminton.

Josie Amandar

Josie is 12 years old. She likes gymnastics, clarinet and violin.

Lexi Maher

Lexi is 13 years old. She likes drawing and painting.

Muhammad Mehmood

Muhammad is a very wise 12-year-old. He likes listening to music and writing stories

Brayden Ng

Brayden is a student at EDSC and is considered an intelligent person, who likes reading and learning.

James Rogers

James Rogers is a 12 years old student at Koonung. He likes sports, maths and science and he drew all images in the anthology.

Zach Tan

Zach is a 13-year-old who likes playing volleyball. That's it.

Baxter Tram

Baxter is a 13-year-old that goes to East Doncaster Secondary College. He likes playing basketball and eating literally anything.

Alvin Chan

Is a 12 year old Alvin. His hobbies are being Alvin and playing games

Anna Drew

Anna is a professional basketball player and likes listening to Taylor Swift.

Paul Kouvrakis

Paul is a 12 year old boy who likes to play video games and read.

Wahaj Azhar

Wahaj is 12 years old and likes watching TV and playing basketball. He can read a 600 page book in 15 hours