

A Novel – Title & words a work in progress:

It Tastes Like Copper – MANUSCRIPT

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By

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“In a world of monotonous horror there could be no salvation in wild dreaming.” – Richard Matheson

Chapters:

1 – It tastes like jam

2 – It all falls down

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7 – It made us red

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Chapter 1 – It tastes like jam

“Push!? Push?!” his brain flickered and eyes blinked awake as she shouted through from the kitchen.

“Push? Hey, Push? Should I put on some eggs for you? Come on, you’ll be late again.”

She said ‘again’ as if it was a regular occurrence, he’d only been late once before and that was months ago. He grumbled under his breath, waking up as he rubbed his eyes and shifted his legs round and out of the bed.

He was warm and naked, stretching his arms above him and drawing in a deep breath of filtered air as the UV lights flicked off and the regular florescent light came to life. He saw his reflection in the mirrored closet door a few feet across the low ceilinged, windowless room and he rubbed his coarse stubbly chin as he smiled gently at himself.

“I’m up hon, I’m just jumping in the shower, give me ten and I’ll be at the table, eggs would be great.”

He walked the few steps into their ensuite bathroom, switched on the shower and leant on the sink as he waited for the water to heat up. The mirror in front of him began its daily routine of streaming through any immediate problems from the base’s science labs, things he could get a head start on during his daily commute.

A few minor issues had crept up during the course of his sleep, a selection of Mist Lungs had malfunctioned in Washington State and had caused a Tactical Ghost Reaction Unit (TGRU) to be deployed, though most seemed to be back up and running now, there were still issues in the region.

He sighed, stepping into the shower, I’ll have to issue an investigation warrant for that he thought as he scrubbed quickly, someone could have got hurt, or worse.

Momentarily he scooted through the small apartment and into the kitchen where is his wife Elizabeth, was sitting at their breakfast bar. Still in her morning gown, she sat looking at the Stream Screen across the room, the bump of their unborn child forcing her to lean backwards on the seat as she held her arm out, rubbing their two year old daughter, Lilly, on the head as the child spooned cereal into her mouth.

“Morning my beautiful ladies,” he said as he walked passed Lilly, ruffling her hair and leaning into Elizabeth to kiss her on the head and place his hand gently on her stomach. Lilly giggled and straightened out her fine blonde locks with her little hands and Elizabeth turned and smiled as he shifted and sat, quickly starting at the eggs and coffee she had laid out for him.

“The streams are saying there was a Lung outage in Washington last night, did you see?”

“Yeah,” he replied, washing back the eggs with his coffee and wiping his lips with his forearm. “The feed came through when I was in the bathroom, I’m going to have to issue an Investigation Warrant, more paperwork, no casualties this time from the report I got, but the Colonel won’t be happy.”

She smiled as she struggled to her feet, picking up his plate and mug, shuffling over to the wash unit.

“Oh, don’t worry about Mann, he understands more than most how these things can happen, the press are the ones you have to worry about, they’re as bad as ever, and with Sympathiser numbers growing all the time, they’re starting to take sides. Anyway, you’ve got to get going, why do I always have to remind you?”

He turned on the chair, away from the screen and looking for his jacket and chuckled lightly.

“I managed to cope for a few years on my own before you came along,” He grinned,

“Some how anyway, don’t you forget that.”

“I know, I know, I just, well, you know, times have changed since then, it’s a different place out there. I just worry, especially with this little one on the way, and Lilly becoming more curious by the day.”

He looked down and patted her bumped tummy gently, before looking back up with her glowing smile, “You know why I do all this, don’t you? Anyway, have a good day honey, take care of yourself.”

He kissed her on the cheek and ruffled Lilly’s hair again, “See you later munchkin!”

“Daddy!” she yelled, before patting her hair down again and getting back to work on her cereal.

He winked at her and moved over to the Hermetic-Seal inner door, grabbing his Goggles and turning whilst zipping his jacket. The familiar swooshing sound of the door made him sigh at the prospect of leaving the warmth and safety of the apartment. He quickly reminded himself that the he was part of the Mist’s development and implementation; he maintains its continual production for the whole of North American. At least partly responsible for this gigantic prison they all now lived in, but things were getting better, their children would have a bright future now. They’d have some future now at least, he thought.

He stepped into the Herm-Seal and the door slid closed behind him, he put his Goggles on and taking a deep breath the Mist crept in, surrounding him from the feet up. Enveloping him, he felt a cold shiver move up his spine as he breathed in the Mist for the first time that day. Its slightly sweet smell reaching inside his nose, its moist particles filling his lungs, he let out a small uncontrollable judder as he breathed out. The smell always worked his taste buds and, even after two years, reminded him of the raspberry jam his mother used to make. The chamber finally full of Mist, his lungs adjusted to its density the

outer door opened to reveal his world.

All he could see was the white. As if he had stepped out into a cloud, the bright reflective Mist out in front of him, denying any impression of perspective. He brought his hand up, only just able to see it in front of his face at arms length, thick today, he thought, their sectors Lung must be working well. He could have been floating if the walls, either side of him in the Herm-Seal, were not there, just about visible, floating above the sounds that he could now hear coming up from the ground below.

The sounds of the transit-bubbles moving into the closest station, the people marching toward them on their daily commute, carefully stepping, always trying to avoid a collision. The Mist Guards shouting orders sporadically and the rhythmical breathing of the Mist Lung close by. Shifting up and down, in and out, billowing out the Mist, their protection, their fluffy cage.

His Goggles came to life and produced a green outline of the small square platform that had moved out in front of him. He stepped carefully onto it, clamps springing up around his legs up to his knee to keep him secure, and it shot towards the ground.

He looked down, moving his head around to see his approach to the earth. The red and blue beacon lights of the Mist Guards were coming into sight and his Goggles automatically tacked onto them and rolled out a virtual floor, over his field of vision, traced with a green lined grid.

They continued to scan and place his surroundings as he came to a stop, targeting onto the people out in front of him, outlining their own Goggles, giving him an idea of where they were with the impression of hundreds of floating sets of eyes. The data flowed in, the Goggle display mapping out walls and other potential hazards that were invisible to him with his natural eye, through the Mist.

They warned him that a transit-bubble was scheduled to arrive in the next couple of

minutes and the display traced out directions in front of him toward the platform.

“1.1km,” the display showed, the same as always, he thought as he simultaneously cursed not living closer to the transit-bubble station.

With the naked eye he could only just about make out the Mist Guards blue and red beacons glowing softly a few dozen yards out in front of him and he stepped off into the crowd as the clamps on his legs released him.

He paced, trying to get to the station platform in time for the next transit-bubble, he'd get into work just on time, if he managed to make it. He slid and dodged between the crowd, trying desperately not to collide with anyone as his Goggles continued to feed him information on the people and objects around him.

“Hey! You!” He heard the deep voice of a Mist Guard directed at him, the anonymous authoritarian voice crackled as it came through the speaker on his face mask. He turned and the Red beacon was pointing at him, his Goggles traced out a line between its tip and his torso, he came to a stop and stood still as it scanned him.

“Slow down...you know the rules, no running.” The voice crackled again. “Arh, oh, erm, sorry Mr Burrows, obviously didn't realise it was you. Please, on your way, but take it slow, we've had one fatality this week, the last thing we want is for you taking a tumble onto the transit tracks.”

“I know officer,” He replied, “I'm running a little late, silly really, need to be on the next bubble”.

“Please, get going, here let me clear a path,” The guard knelt down and put the red end of his beacon stick into the ground, a red line of light, about a foot in width, shot out in front and disappeared into the Mist. He heard some faint grumbles as the floating eyes of the other commuters as they shifted off the red path, creating a clearing.

“Thank you,” Push replied as he moved away, walking briskly down the red line,

following it to the transit-bubble platform, all the while his Goggles mapping out the floating eyes of other people on either side of him. He made it to the platform as a bead of bubbles pulled up, the green wire lines of the Goggle's display showing the carriage's outlines as the track below them throbbed with red light through the mist.

He jumped into one and grabbed onto a handle above his head as other commuters streamed on, packing themselves in tightly and largely remaining silent, sullen with morning apathy.

"Feeds on, comments on, comms on," he said under his breath, activating his Goggles. He had about 40 minutes ahead of him, a time he usually used to catch up on everything he had left behind the day before. His display dropped the floating eyes around him, the green wireframe of the inside of the bubble. He was surrounded by the Mist again, only the closest pale bodies faintly visible with his unaided eye as his Goggles filled his vision with the information he had asked for.

"Good morning, Mr Burrows," he heard his secretary through his earphones as a small window popped up on the Goggle display, showing her at her desk in the military base he was shooting towards. "Your morning schedule consists of..."

She listed his daily activities as he read and planned for the day ahead, the widespread Lung failure in Washington State was interesting. The sympathisers had attacked Lungs before, but nothing in this number, or with such success he thought. Like his wife had said, their numbers were growing all the time, but they were largely unorganised. Their leader David Shattock, was never a good tactician, highly motivated but more of a speaker than a doer, a scientist, just one with messed up ideas, and least of all a terrorist, like the feeds had begun calling him.

He had known him once, they had studied together, broaching the problem of the Ghosts and possible solutions to their threat. Why they had come into existence and what

sort of real damage they could do to humanity. They didn't have long to study and observe before the attacks came and all hell broke loose. Their research was stepped up and the Saint Albert Collaboratory Science and Military Program implemented, though things moved slowly.

Then as the attacks really stepped up and Shattock split off, becoming more of a politician than a scientist really, an idealist who's ideas were too far out for people to consider seriously, a radical in a time when conservative science was needed.

Push had to abandon his old friend, what other choice did he have, his wife had just told him he was pregnant and as the threat from the Ghosts grew by the day, he knew something had to be done to protect them. So, the international team of scientists that was brought together worked around the clock to solve the threat and came up with the Mist.

"Colonel Michael Mann has also left you a message, Mr Burrows," his secretary said, as he came back into focus.

"I know, I saw the comm. Link in my display," he replied.

"But he asked me I personally remind you, before you get too busy, he was quite specific, he said..."

"Okay, I get the picture, I'll look now, listen, I'll be about 15 minutes, thanks for the update, comms off." The little window where his secretary shot away from the display in front of him.

"Colonel Michaels comment, number 7283," he spoke quietly after he was sure the comms link was broken.

"Morning Push, I just wanted to give you the heads up on this, we'll talk in person no doubt, but this is big, something's wrong with Washington State, I can't say in the message but it's not good, get your thinking cap on..." Push watched his old friend talk to him in his display, a distinctly concerned line through his ruggedly handsome good looks, upsetting

the natural charm they had.

He continued, "I've only got vague details myself, god damned Ghost Intelligence Agency (GIA) isn't letting anything go, the bastards. But I've got friends you know, there's rumour's all over the base. Anyway, I just didn't want you walking into this thing unprepared buddy, see you soon, out." The window housing the uniformed Colonel dropped away to the side of his display and a red panel began to throb rhythmically in its centre, before highlighting a message in black writing.

"Mist Production Agency HQ Transit-Bubble station arrival in t-minus 1 minute"

The reading turned to seconds and continued to count down as he felt a shuffle close by.

"Okay," he said to himself, "Feeds off, visuals on," his feeds dropped off the display and the floating eyes of those around him shot into position, the wireframe of the bubble carriage was outlined and the door highlighted.

His carriage came to a halt and he manoeuvred through the packed commuters, as usual he was the only person to exit at this stop, no floating eyes following him. He stepped out onto the platform and the lines of the station were drawn out in front of him, as always the directional path shot out for him to follow and he stepped on. Through the small terminal and out to the roadway that lead to the MPA's entrance, wireframes continually drawing themselves for him to avoid walking into any hazards.

"Lung facility number 001, MPA HQ, six hour productivity graph," he spoke to his Goggles as he walked. The graph popped up, transparent in his peripheral vision. He continued to walk, keeping a straight line down the pathway and glancing at the graph in the corner of his eye. It showed good production, he could tell, the sweet scent of the Mist was stronger around the base, almost sickly,

"Drop graph," he mumbled and looked up to see it, the gigantic Mist Lung behind the HQ building was drawn out in front of him by his Goggles, towering above the single

story base that was largely underground.

At about 300ft tall he was always impressed by their structure, even though he'd not seen one in the flesh since the day they had turned them on. Gigantic bio-mechanical protectors, breathing up and down, slowly pumping out their shielding layer, almost hypnotic in their regularity, he listened to deep whirring sound it made as it drew breath.

Like a huge pear, its wide and fat base collapsing and raising, thinning to the top that peeled open like a big gulping mouth that pushed out thousands of cubic feet of the Mist with every breath. Its winged vents rising up around it, like petals around an inner flower, a thousand feet or more, protruding out of the cloud they created. Able to breathe in the still fresh air that exists high up, out of the cloud, but where the menace, dwells, where the Ghosts can exist now.

He reached the entrance of the HQ, and stood still as he was scanned by one of the Mist Guards that kept duty outside.

"Good morning Mr Burrows, please, move along," he said, crackling through his speaker, the same anonymous, authoritarian voice as the previous one he had spoken to. He always wondered whether they had some sort of voice manipulation filter on their voices, to make them all sound the same. Anonymity begets obedience and kills the questioning mind, he thought. If anything ever did cause the people to get violent, the Mist Guards, the Gendarmerie of the civilian population, would be the first line in restoring order. The fodder to throw at the mob before the TGRU's moved in, best they are all alike, willing to take orders.

He made his way into the Herm-Seal and the door swooshed behind him again, the Mist was drawn out and he took his Goggles off, able to see unaided again, now inside the base, and he stepped out. Walking down a myriad of grey corridors, the round florescent lights passing over head, his shoes squeaked on the polished floors as he came to a halt

by his office door.

“Good morning Rosie,” he said to his secretary who was sat at her desk, typing and flicking away at her Stream screen desk terminal.

“Arh, Mr Burrows, did you watch Colonel Michael’s message? You see, he’s already here, apparently it couldn’t wait, I’ve shown him through to your office and given him a coffee, he’s been here for about 10 minutes.” She spoke in her usual matter of fact way.

He grabbed himself coffee from the machine and moved into the room where the Colonel was waiting.

Sat with his back to him as he entered the room, the green North American Ghost Marine Corps uniform, pressed, square shouldered and ridged as always. He heard a slurp and smiled as the door closed.

“Push, shit, thank Christ you’re here, did you get chance to think any more on what I said in my message?” Mann said turning to face and follow him as he walked around and sat at his desk.

“Well, you weren’t exactly too forthcoming with your information were you now Colonel.” Push replied, putting his coffee down and looking at him through the end of his nose.

“Hah! Don’t give me that ‘Colonel’ bullshit this morning old pal, we really don’t have the time, give me your thoughts,”

“Well, I figure Shattock got his shit together, he’s some how organised himself and rallied some of his other Sympathisers, some of the more motivated ones and they’ve managed their first coordinated attack on the lung facilities, and for some reason he’s chosen Washington State? Probably because it’s the other side of the country from our HQ here in New York, and he has the opportunity to escape over the Canadian border, up into the mountains there, above Vancouver.” He raised his hand and looked quizzically at the

Colonel for an answer.

“Push, I wish it was that simple, we could take out Shattock then and no one would think he’s a god damned martyr for his whacked out ideas about the Ghosts, god damn it, proving there’s a link between them and humanity?”

“Well, come on,” Push sat on the desk, sipping his coffee, gesturing that he needed more information if he were to deduce anything of any warrant. He had a few ideas, but he tried to quash them. His mind had wandered in that direction once before and he’d been reprimanded for it. They were too terrible to think about, he did not want to speak of them until he’d got all the facts from Mann.

“We’ve lost contact with Washington State, Push. It’s a black zone, nothing coming in or out. The last comms we had with them were shortly after the first dozen Lungs went down, although that was instigated from our side. We noticed a few of the Lungs drop off the grid but heard nothing, then we sent in the 103rd TGR Battalion to help clear up and contain any mess, a thousand men Push, we didn’t hear anything from them either. We kept trying the usual channels of communication, and eventually got an answer, although I’m not privy to know what that answer was at this time. I just know Ghost Contamination Protocol Level 1 has been executed across the whole state. GIA isn’t saying anything, they don’t want any leaks, they’re talking to the press saying a few Lungs have gone down and there’s problem’s with power supply to the area. Hinting that Shattock might have hit the area, but keeping everyone pretty much blacked out. The press are playing up to it, as you’d expect.”

Push’s eyes had gone wide, his skin pale as his adrenal glands kicked in, surprise, fear, shock, all ran through his body. Thoughts were streaming into his head, their early research, the potential problems with the Mist, why it had to be a short term solution, the

problems it might cause with long term exposure.

“Hey, buddy, you look like you’ve seen a ghost,” Mann quipped as he stood up and began pacing around the room.

“I know how you’re feeling though,” he continued. “I could hardly believe it myself, it’s been like this for the last few hours, we’re just playing a waiting game, intel came in and took over everything. I’m under orders to do exactly what they request, give them as many of my men as they need, we’re equipping another TGRU right now. Come on, Push, I need to know what think, you know Shattock and the Mist inside and out, better than most.”

“Listen,” Push began slowly, sitting down into his chair, pushing back his fluffy brown hair. “The Mist, it works right? The Ghosts cannot exist inside it and if it’s thick enough they cannot pass through it or jump around it, it’s what protects us from their attacks. We discovered inadvertently that the antiplatelet nature of aspirin could disintegrate their ectoplasmatic structure. Essentially melting them out of our atmosphere when they came into contact with it, but the Mist was always planned as a short term solution. It was your guy’s jobs to weaponize the Mist effectively, you and the GIA. You were meant to go after the Threat and to take out any that were already here, quickly neutralise any new ones, so that we didn’t have to live in this hell permanently.”

“Shit, I know all that Push, and I know we’ve been failing miserably. The boys over at R&D can’t put together a weapon that’s safe to operate and kills the enemy at the same time, and the god damned GIA aren’t helping matters. What? What’s your point Push?” Mann replied with an unsettled tone.

“Well, we never had chance to figure our prolonged effects on the human body of the Mist, of breathing it day in day out for years, we just had to go ahead with it. Now, there’s the train of thought that we will eventually evolve to the Mist right? That’s common knowledge and been banded around since it first settled. What people have been afraid of

talking about, and has been quashed by GIA over and over, is the possibility of it causing mutations in humans, causing violent shifts in people's genetic make up."

"Shit, I've heard the rumours too, but just vague ideas banded around by the water cooler crowd, I've been trying not to pay attention to them and their paranoia." Mann put his coffee down, palms flat on to the top of Push's desk, leaning forward into him with concern mounting in his eyes. "Not so paranoid any more hey, Push? I mean, what do you think we're dealing with here? Are you seriously thinking mutations?"

"The antiplatelet nature of the Mist, it's thought it might cause reactions in people, right, but we weren't sure what might happen. The Mist Lungs we genetically engineered to breath out the Mist, they're essentially breathing out airborne aspirin, albeit mixed with some other things, and the aspirin is in the smallest amounts possible. Just enough to keep the Ghosts out. We know the affects that aspirin has on the human body, have done for centuries, it naturally causes the thinning of blood. But breathing it in, almost continuously? That's something different. There's rarely been any fatalities because of it, like I said the aspirin it's in such small amounts in the Mist, but that said, it can still be life threatening and there will be groups of people who will react quicker and more violently to the atmospheric change than others. Take this group of people and combine them with other factors, like how the Mist acts as a perfect UV filter for instance and you get rumours, and there's nothing worse than a bunch of gossiping scientists with weird trains of thought and nobody willing to listen. Back in the original research, thoughts that were quickly swept aside as our concern with saving humanity was highlighted by more deaths each day."

"What sort of rumours? What are you talking about?"

"Put it this way Mann, what can you think of that needs blood to survive, lives in complete darkness, has super heightened senses in every other regard because of its nocturnal habits, but reduced mental capacity? Huh? And well, chuck in super strength,

just for kicks?

“Oh fuck. Vampires?” Mann said, palming his face.

“Bingo.” Push replied.

Chapter 2 – It all Falls down

“I need a drink,” Colonel Michaels started, moving away from the desk and over the room to Push’s liquor cabinet.

“But it’s only just gone 9am Mann?” Push replied with a hint of alarm in his voice.

Stepping up Mann clinked two tumbler glasses out of the cupboard and poured a generous measure of scotch into both, gulping one down and walking over to the desk to hand the other to Push.

“God damn it, nothing tastes the same since the Mist,” he growled as he wiped the moisture from his mouth with the sleeve of his uniform.

“Here, get this down you,” he continued.

Push grabbed the glass from the Colonel and put it down on the desk.

“Jesus, I’ve only been awake just over an hour, give me a break, what’s up with you? Suck it up, I’ve not seen you like this in years.”

Mann coughed, “Fuck, Push, I’ve been up all night with this shit, no one telling me anything, just giving me orders, the GIA keeping us all in the dark as always. There’s me, sending my men out, men who trusted me, men with families, some were my friends, Push! Now you’re saying there’s a chance they’ve been eaten by god damn vampires?! What the hell?”

“Look, I’m not saying anything at the moment, it’s purely conjecture, you asked, I’m just trying to deduce the facts, trying to piece something together from the bits of information that we’ve got. Hey, it could all be just like the GIA say it is, there’s been power outages and stuff.” Push shrugged his shoulders and knew that was a lie, and he knew Mann knew he was lying, but his voice still carried a false tone of optimism.

“Hah! No, they know what’s going on alright, they’re experimenting with my men,

and in the mean time we're stuck here with no answers." Mann turned away from Push, and spoke commands into his lapel communicator.

"Captain Bear Rodgers, how are you progressing with the 105th TGR Battalion preparations?"

"Sir, we're on schedule for deployment momentarily, the men are fully armed and loading onto the Bubble-Ship now," Rodgers replied.

"Delay the deployment, prep for two extra passengers, we'll need to be fully kitted out for tactical operation alongside you and the men, get to it."

"Sir, yes, Sir," Rodgers' voice crackled out.

The Colonel turned to face Push who was staring blankly, walking up to the desk and grabbing the second glass of whiskey he had tried to get him to drink moments before.

"What?" he said innocently before gulping back the liquor.

"Two passengers? So, now we're going to Washington State? I'm not a field man Colonel, you've seen me out there before and it isn't where I belong. I belong here in the lab, testing and deducing, figuring things out." Push tried to reason, tapping buttons on his desk in a vain effort to look knowledgeable.

"Look, we're not going to get answers from the GIA, they're going to keep quiet until this thing, this incident, gets out of control, then it's going to be too late, they're incompetent at best, and down right fools at worst and they've not got you, Push. They use the scientists that agree with them and they think the Mist is the answer to all our woe, their blind arrogance won't let them see what you're thinking, they'll keep sending in my men until they think the situation is rectified, when we both know there needs to be a bigger response!" Michaels slammed down the now empty tumbler onto the desk, next to his first,

“My men will do what I say; they hate those Agency suits as much as we do. I’m changing mission priorities,” he said turning away again.

“This is now an extraction mission, we’re going to go in, get any men we have left, collect evidence to show to the Agency and get the hell out, but I need you Push, I need the science on the ground for this one.” Michaels leant his head into his lapel again.

“Captain. Immediate mission status change, scratch tactical response, I’ve received some extra information, reassign for civilian and military extraction.”

“Sir, yes, Sir!” the captain replied with detectable enthusiasm.

“Jesus Michaels, you’re following me on a hunch? You’ll be court-martialled, your career will be over?”

“My men, Push, they’re my concern.”

Push quickly scanned through his feeds on his Stream-screen desk terminal, the press were now reporting that there was major power outages throughout Washington State, a TGRU had been deployed to eradicate any Ghost threat, restore power and Mist to the region, and that everything was basically under control. They failed to mention now the level 1 ghost contamination protocol had been initiated. The GIA had probably kept it from them, thinking everything would be fine, and now they’ve lost contact with the TGRU battalion they are sweating about what to tell them, prepping more of Michael’s men to go in and sort everything out, but Push knew that was false hope.

“I’m on your side Mann, you know I always am” Push finally said, looking up to Michaels, who had turned back around.

“Let’s do this,” he replied.

Push had grabbed his Stream-Plate as he left the office, heading toward the Bubble-Ship hanger with the Colonel and two Mist guards in tow. He began collecting all the information

he could find from the original Saint Albert Collaboratory Science and Military Program (SACSAMP). The programme that he had been a part of with David Shattock, as the Ghosts began to appear, and then began to attack humans, first in isolated pockets, gradually developing into a serious global problem. Working alongside some of the world's greatest minds he, being an experimental pharmaceutical scientist, was pivotal helping in develop the aspirin induced Mist that the Ghosts could not penetrate.

Colonel Michaels' buffed shoes clicked on the floor while Push's plimsolls squeaked as they closed in on the hangar. Push still burying himself in digital papers and studies that looked into the effects of the Mist on the human anatomy. The possibility of mutations a key concern in his searches, Michaels had even broke military cordons on certain information to help his effort. He delved into their archives looking at experiments on Mist Criminals, those who chose to wander the streets without their Goggles, or had modified them so they could go unnoticed in the Mist, to steal and murder and rape. Death sentences passed, certain subjects were pulled to be researched on, forced to breathe highly potent Mist for months on end.

The results were negligible, subjects would often die from blood thinning, tinnitus and death by hemorrhagic stroke. But the other elements of actually living in the Mist had been removed, they were given daily UV therapy, they were indoors for the most part, never needing their Goggles, and never being subject to the sensory deprivation that the Mist brings. There was no real research that looked into actually living in the Mist, the scientist had equated breathing the Mist as living inside it, which was a false thesis. He continued looking as he entered the hangar and called his wife.

"Hey honey, just a quick call, I've been assigned to a field trip, nothing urgent, just not going to be back for a night or two," he began.

"There's something the matter isn't there, there's something going on in Washington

State they're not telling us?" Elizabeth replied, she knew him too well, even though it was just a voice based comms-stream, she could tell from the shifting tones.

"Listen," he turned away from Michaels and their escort Mist Guards, pulling his comms unit buttoned to his scientist overcoat to his mouth and speaking quietly.

"God damnit, why do you have to know me so well? There *is* something up with Washington State, we don't know what yet, we're flying over there now with another Ghost Reaction Unit. It's an extraction mission, I'll be gone a day at the most, 5 hours there, 10 hours in the region, 5 hours back. Look, I've got to go, I love you, kiss the little one for me, I'll be back tomorrow evening. Just don't leave the apartment before then. Don't worry, we've got it under control."

She was frightened but told him what he needed to hear, "I love you to Push, I'll sit tight and see you tomorrow evening."

He turned to face the giant hangar, the Bubble-Ship prepped, full of TGRU Mist Marines and fuel, ready to leave. A huge oval sphere, a few hundred feet in diameter, it looked like a massive bubble full of smoke. The actual ship was contained within the bubble, surrounded by a permanent barrier of Mist blocking the Ghost threat from getting inside the ship and wiping out its contents before it had even managed to take off properly.

"Here, put your sweat-suit on," Michaels picked one up from the rail at the side of the entrance and threw it over to Push.

"God damn it, I've not worn one of these in years, since the Mist first came down, have they improved the technology or what?" Push replied, dismayed at the prospect of the intense heat that he might have to endure.

"Hah! Why do you think they still call it the sweat-suit?" The Colonel replied whilst lighting a cigar and continuing to talk, puff and wriggle.

“The Tactical Ghost Prevention Suit is your last line of defence against the Ghost threat. It will save your life if you remain alert enough, the layer of Mist constantly pumped around the suit acts as a final barrier between you and the enemy, if you should be attacked, you’ll have seconds to move or destroy it. Rather than losing your shit instantly.” He chewed the end of his cigar, puffing hard, and pulled the suit up over his torso and over his shoulders, one at a time.

“Great,” Push replied before getting into his own suit.

Once prepped they walked through the Bubble-ship’s outer layer and into the Mist contained within. The Colonel still carried his cigar, even though the hood of their suit was up and relaying information back to them the same way their Goggles would if they were outside. They walked up the entrance of the Ship contained within the Bubble, into the large loading bay at its back, the final pieces of cargo being loaded and secured into position.

“Mind you don’t get caught by one of these loading robots,” Michaels laughed through his mask at Push, who was walking behind him with tentative steps.

The loading bay ramp closed behind them and sealed tight. They made their way through the ship and into the galley where the majority of the TGRU had sat for some food before mission briefing and deployment. The thousand strong battalion sat munching at their tables, all in rows along the length of the ship, the room had been temporarily evacuated from Mist so they could lower their hoods and eat. All taking place whilst they ascended slowly through the ground settled Mist layer

. Once above the cloud, the entire ship would be flooded with the Mist and the bubble would contain the shroud around them at all times.

The Colonel pulled his hood down and pushed his cigar back into his mouth, lighting it with a long match he’d struck on the table they had come to sit at. Puffing, he

began.

“What data have you got?”

“Not much,” Push replied, “There’s never really been any research into this, North American Ghost Marine Corps (NAGMC), or you guys, have always botched your research, never really fully understanding the phenomenon. The GIA have always been scared of the results of anything independent that could have yielded real insight, so they’ve killed it off before it could really get going.”

“Hey, we’re warriors, not scientists, don’t blame us for not getting anywhere with our research, that’s your job” the Colonel spoke with some resentment, pointing his cigar at Push.

“Christ, am I not busy enough already maintaining Mist production for the whole of North America? I’ve got to pick up your slack as well? Anyway, it’s not us scientists or the military that’s to blame here. We’re both understaffed, the GIA soaks up the best minds, brain washes them and gets them to do their bidding, whilst it pulls in the big numbers to fill their Mist Gendarmerie, we’re both fucked.”

The Colonel grunted and puffed a thick cloud of smoke into the air.

“I wish the Mist could smell like this stuff, Push. Don’t think I don’t know about the GIA, it’s all I hear from my superiors and from my men. Christ, what are we getting ourselves into here? My men are loyal to the death, my superiors trust my judgement and hate the GIA as much as the rest of us, and now we’re all collaborating against the bastards to try and find out answers, and for what Push? Are we going to save the day?”

The Colonel stood, put his cigar in the side of his mouth and yelled.

“Men, are we going to save the day?!”

“Sir, Yes, Sir” the 1000 strong battalion replied in unison

“They certainly seem to think so,” Push replied.

“Well, they would Push, like I said, they’re warriors. Now, let’s get down to business,” The Colonel remained stood and signalled to his captain whilst Push attempted to eat the slop that had been put down in front of him.

“Rodgers, get the men hooded, we have mission briefing in 20 minutes,” He said as he stubbed what was left of his cigar out on his plate and pulled his suit hood back over his head.

“Sir, straight away sir.” The captain replied, before turning and shouting to the room “Hoods up men! We have debriefing in 20 minutes, Mist ducts opening imminently.”

The room sprang to life, the marines pulling their hoods up and began moving out into the debriefing room as the room filled back up with Mist and service robots cleared away the mess.

Once the men were seated the Colonel stood at the room of the gigantic lecture theatre space, Push at one side, his Captain at the other, and began speaking.

“What we have here men is a quagmire of Ghost ridden shit. We are currently on route to Seattle, back into Washington State. As of approximately 0500 hours we lost contact with TGRU- Alpha1, who were sent in on orders handed down from the GIA to provide cover and assist with the restoration of power to the main Mist processing facility in Seattle. The GIA are currently shitting their pants, not telling us anything and trying to pass off lies to the media that this had something to do with the Sympathisers. In the mean time they have enforced Ghost Contamination Protocol Level 1 across the entire state, putting up temp-Mist walls and keeping everyone out with their Mist Gendarmerie. The first time this has ever happened state wide.” The Colonel walked around his podium in the Mist filled room, its green wire outline moving out of his vision, a thousand floating eyes perfectly still in front of him.

“Now, Push Burrows here, one of the lead scientists on the original SACSAMP has

provided us with information that the GIA is either ignorant to, or is holding on to tightly, either way the Generals, on my recommendation alongside a few other high ranking officers, have decided that to limit further civilian and military casualties, we must react. Push, if you please.” The Colonel’s floating eyes turned to Push, motioning him to take the floor.

Push cleared his throat, “Yes, thank you Colonel, well, basically there have been theories banded around for some time that prolonged exposure to the Mist, living within it for years on end, might cause violent reactions in human genetic make up. It was never designed as a long term solution to the Ghost threat, but no real research has ever taken place. Anyway, I’ve theorised about what has taken place in Washington State is the first shift.” Push cleared his throat and held onto the podium tightly.

“We will potentially encounter an enemy unlike any other we have seen before. An enemy with vampire like qualities, one that needs the blood of others to survive, is infectious, has heightened sensory capabilities in order to see and manoeuvre well in the Mist, and possibly animal like, superior strength. Though, they may also have weaknesses, if my thinking is correct they’ll be vulnerable to UV light and if they do not sustain their blood lust, they could die quickly of hemorrhagic stroke. Now, to what happened in Washington, it’s likely that the occupants of Washington State realised that the mutations had violent reactions to UV light, through the UV lighting systems installed inside all buildings. With this information they went about destroying the Mist Lungs, preferring to try their chances with the Ghosts rather than the other enemy. Why no communications came from Washington State is unclear, however, if the vampiric threat is able to maintain the memory of its human host, with rudimentary intelligence they could have attacked the feed lines, effectively isolating the state to the outside world. This is speculation at the moment, but it’s the best we’ve got whilst the GIA keep their doors shut.”

The room stirred, the men not entirely sure what to think.

“So, you’re saying we’re flying straight into an area rampant with Ghosts and Vampires?” A voice came through their multiple comms-stream.

“Erm, well,” Push began again, “Well, I’ve cross referenced my theories with the bits of intel that we *do* have and I’ve deduced that there could be pockets of these vampiric creatures gathered around the few Mist Lungs that are left, trying to protect themselves from the UV light, and possibly from the Ghosts. If these mutations have taken place, the victims will probably be starved of blood by the time we get to them though, again, this might mean they’ll be in a weakened state.” Push let out a quick stream of air and reached as if to stretch his collar before realising his suit was sealed.

“Unfortunately we’re expecting most, if not all, human life in the region to have been whipped out. Without Mist the Ghost Threat would have killed everything that wasn’t already bled to death by these mutant vampires. We’re expecting negligible numbers to have survived. What we need to do is pick up anyone that has managed to survive this long, collect data and get the hell out of their, it’s a snatch and grab operation. I need samples so I can confirm what I think is happening, take it to the GIA and get this mess sorted out before it’s too late.” Push finished, stepping back from the podium.

“There you have it men, we know not what to expect when we get in there, but it’s likely to be carnage not witnessed since the Mist has settled, so prepare yourselves. We’re walking into a highly volatile situation, rampant with mutated humans, threats of Ghost activity and not knowing how or why it all happened. We’re breaking a Level 1 Ghost Contamination Protocol which means we’re on our own and flying under the radar. Now, Tactical Overview Foxtrot Beta Zero,” The Colonel spoke and a window of tactical information dropped into the display of each marine in the room.

“We go straight to Seattle, carpet bomb the entire city with 1000lbs Mist Shells that

will give us enough cover for the time we need, hoping that no massive wind comes through. We drop 500 of you at the North and 500 at the South of the city and sweep, moving into the middle.” The Colonel spoke as the window displayed areas on a map of the city and other mission details.

“You’ll be equipped traditional projectile based weaponry, backed up by Mist-Grenadier Specialists.” He said to excited jeers from the marines.

“I know it’s been a while since many of you have had chance to fire real guns, but keep your heads cool, I don’t want an itchy trigger fingers out there, but don’t let your guard down. If you encounter anyone who seems to have mutated you shoot on sight. We will need samples however, so also look to trap subjects if possible. Air support will launch probes as soon as we cross the state line to detect any signs of life across the region, we’ll co-ordinate with the Air-Force if any more extraction units are needed, we’ve talked with their commanders and they’re prepared to back us up if necessary and get themselves in the air as soon as possible. Good luck men, we deploy upon arrival at approximately 1500 hours. Vaporize yourselves some apparition.” Michaels turned and walked out of the room, followed by Push.

“Good work there, Push,” He said to him through a direct comms-stream.

“Yeah,” Push replied with indignation. “Let’s just hope I’m wrong.”

Chapter 3 – It died already dead

The Bubble-Ship swept over Seattle, dropping its entire cargo of 1000lbs Mist-Shells and coating the city in a sweet smelling shroud. The pilot team held the craft steady as they flew through mass Ghost gatherings that had accumulated around the city after its citizens, in mad panic, had destroyed their only protection against them.

“Approaching the first drop off point, Colonel” Captain Alza said as the ships protective bubble cloud evaporated the Ghosts they flew through. The gigantic 15ft high and 30ft wide screen in front of them tracking their course, targeting and analysing the Ghost threat that lay on their flight path.

“Take it easy Captain, bring her down on Alpha-001 coordinates as soon as you can.” Colonel Michaels replied as he walked into the cockpit. “The men are prepped, we need to get this show on the road. Once the drop off is complete hold position over Charlie-003 coordinates, the Space Needle, and wait to join the men when they reach the University of Washington Medical Center.” He finished, gripping Alza’s shoulder before exiting again.

“Push, I’m going to need you in the command centre, we’re going to be attached by remote viewer to Delta-Ghostteam, or the Dirty Dogs as they like to call themselves, they’re one of the best fireteams I’ve got. If there’s anyone that’s going to bag one of these things, it’s going to be these guys.” He switched the tone in his voice, opening up a new comms-stream. “Corporal Ruffshot, Burrows and I will be following the Dirty Dogs from the ships command centre, you’re patrolling Aurora Ave to the Green Lake Park Mist Lung right? We’ll be watching and relaying orders. Don’t let me down Ruffshot.” He finished.

“Sir, that’s right, and I won’t sir,” Ruffshot replied in a gruff voice, awash with experience, a veteran of wars prior to the Mist and many reaction unit missions since.

“Great,” Push replied, picking up his Stream-Plate and moving off up to the command-centre. Followed shortly by the Colonel, they were both jolted into their seats as the craft touched down and the first batch of marines raced off into the Mist outside. Both of them leant to the console in front of them, pulled a small cord out from the position they were sat at and plugged it into the integrated Goggles of their sweat suits. Their displays glowed red for a second before an image grew from the middle outwards leaving a small red line around their periphery of their vision. They were now seeing everything the squadron leader was seeing, and they could switch between him and his second in command, Brian Kwalski, at any point.

“Okay, we’re connected, comms link established, Ruffshot are you there?” Michaels said as he sat motionless in the command centre. Both him and Push laying back slightly on their chairs, loose straps around their torsos to prevent accidents happening if they reacted or jumped to any imagery fed to them by the vision of the person they were following.

“Loud and clear, Colonel.” Ruffshot replied, looking around and leading his men down the loading bay ramp off the ship, through its protective Mist bubble.

He could see better on the ground than expected, the Mist was thinner. Their aerial bombardment had done a good job but the shroud was not as potent as when created by the network of Mist Lungs. He could make out shapes the green wire lines drew over by his Goggles up to 15 feet away.

“Moving out, Ghost-team sound off, move on coordinate group 620-G. Kwalski, you take the rear, everyone else, wedge formation. We’ve got about three hours here before this Mist is thin enough for the Ghosts to survive. Stay frosty.”

Push watched through the eyes of Corporal Ivan Ruffshot, he settled into the rhythmical nature of his pacing, his heavy projectile-weapon in his hands out in front of him

bobbing up and down, steady and ready to fire at a split seconds notice.

He watched the buildings move past, row after row, but no sign of any movement, no sign of anything, just cars and shop fronts, the occasional smashed window. The city was eerily calm, filled with the stomping sounds of the Ghost-team's heavy boots. Noticeably missing the sound of its bustling inhabitants, shuffling around, trying to avoid collision in the Mist as guards shouted orders, it was still. The close by Mist Lung was dead, its deep breathing not adding any beat or rhythm to the thick air. No floating eyes, just the grey with some colour from the surroundings passing through, adding a dirty wash to it.

"Oh God!" Push yelled finally, noticing something in Ruffshots vision field he'd obviously not seen as the team moved steadily forward, down Aurora Ave at a slight jogging pace.

"What!?! Wait, men!" Ruffshot answered, coming to a halt, the sounds of boots behind him all stepping into ridging firing positions.

"Pan right, zoom, there, look! Bodies, all piled up, Jesus!" Push spoke down the microphone to Ruffshot, who did as he was told, panning and zooming. He noticed the high pile a few dozen feet away, just breaking through the thin mist. High enough it was visible over the car that was partially obstructing the view. Some at the side of the road, the mound getting bigger up onto the pavement and higher still as it fed into the wall, where it was highest.

"Steady men, move in, steady...steady..." Ruffshot spoke, taking slow steps up toward the sloping pile. Gravel under steady feet and the slow breathing the only sound to be heard, silence and Mist all around.

"Shitfuck!" Ruffshot's visual stream crackled and the sound of gun fire made him jump forward and turn around. Kwalski was on the ground shooting his light machine gun

wildly, a dark figure on top of him, wrestling with him and overpowering him.

“Die you fucking beast!” He screamed as he pulled his weapon back under control, jamming the barrel into the attackers mouth and firing. The beasts head splattered open and it slumped down onto him, a dead weight.

“Get this fucking thing off me then!” He shouted at the Ghost-team as they stood, momentarily in shock from the extraordinary beast that had just attacked him. Ruffshot broke first, moving up, grabbing the body by its ripped shirt with his big gloved hand and throwing it to the side, brain and skull flecking against Kwalski’s sweat-suit hood.

“Shit, well, Push, looks like you were right. Men, on alert, who knows how many of those things are around here, if Push is right, and now there’s Mist protection again, the ones that survived will be coming out of the cracks.” The Colonel shouted down the microphone as the rest of them came back to life.

“Shit, you alright, Marine?” Ruffshot said to Kwalski as they linked arms and he helped pull him up off the ground.

“You tell me sir, I’ve never seen anything like that before, what the fuck?” he replied through heavy pants.

“Men, circle formation around me,” Ruffshot ordered, they moved around him creating a wall of weapons and flesh.

“Burrows, Colonel, I’m going to watch back Kwalski’s display.” He paused. “Marine Brian Kwalski, image ident, display replay, minus 3 minutes. Play.” He spoke to his Goggles.

His display flickered and was overridden by what Kwalski had seen 3 minutes ago, the thin red line around it signifying he was seeing someone else’s feed. He crouched and saw Kwalski marching forward, behind the wedge formation created by the other team members, himself at the point. He watched and listened, unable to see what was going on

around him, outside of his Goggles. Observing he heard some rustling, Kwalski still walking in formation but turning to the noise, then the uncomfortable patting sound of skin on concrete that quickly hastened into a rhythmical gallop like that of a quadruped, and then a split second of silence.

“Holy fuck!” Push shouted as he watched a man in formal business suit shoot out of the Mist from above and down onto Kwalski, his face covered in blood and hitting him to the ground. Kwalski not reacting fast enough, getting over run and starting to shoot, the man chomping down, missing the bites by a fraction as his chosen victim jolted about on the floor trying to shake him off. Then recovering, Kwalski pulling his arms in, still trying to wrestle himself free and shoving his gun into the beast’s mouth, and finally the explosion of its head.

“What the fuck is that?” Ruffshot said as the display dropped and went back to the live stream.

“That’s your vampire, gentlemen. Marine Brian Kwalski, image ident, display replay, freeze frame, minus 1 minute 29 seconds.” Push replied, their displays now showing the still image from the recording. The vampiric mans face close up, blood dripping, mouth wide open showing fangs, his eyes were like black orbs and extraordinarily pale skin. Enough so they could see the veins and capillaries running through his face.

“Colonel, distribute this image to your men, order them to proceed with extreme caution, there are still vampires alive out there, they are strong and fast, and they’re desperate for blood.” Push said to Michaels who went about relaying the image to his men. “Ruffshot, take your men over to the pile you were originally heading for, careful now.”

They moved out again, Kwalski wiping the blood and brain bits from the lenses of his Goggles. Approaching the piled bodies with caution, Ruffshots Goggle display detected a Herm-Seal behind the pile; it drew a directional guide out in front of him.

“This might be our chance men, do you want me to proceed, Burrows?” Ruffshot said.

“Absolutely Ruffshot, exercise extreme caution, move the bodies away from the Herm-Seal, ready your Net-Gun, there may well be a live one trapped in there. Any you see on the street, terminate with extreme prejudice, don’t take any risks.”

“Understood. Men, get to it,” he ordered. The rest of the team started quickly shifting the bodies as he attached his net barrel to his gun and trained his sights on the Herm-Seal entrance. The power was out and the door lifeless as it revealed itself behind the bodies, it’ll need to be opened manually, he thought.

“Sir, not all of these bodies are those vampire things, look.” Kwalski said, as he walked around the pile.

“Look Sir, we’ve got these vamps, looks like they’ve died from not getting anyone’s blood,” he nudged the skull of one as Ruffshot side stepped over slowly, keeping his gun targeted to the door. “We’ve got people here, sir, look, they’ve been bitten all over, their necks, their arms, their chests, these things just don’t let up, bled dry. And look, humans with electro-paralysis, obviously attacked by Ghosts, and some of the Vamps gone that way as well.”

“It looks like the Ghosts don’t discriminate,” Push said, moving into the conversation as he watched through Kwalski’s display.

“I can’t decide if that’s a good or bad thing, either way, it looks like the vampires minds are affected the same way a humans is when a Ghost passes through it. Feeding on the electrical bio energy like they do with us, whether or not the vampires have more or less going on in their minds, I don’t know, I guess we’ll figure out when you bag one. How’s the work on that door coming along Ruffshot?” Push asked switching display back to Ruffshot’s.

“Almost there sir, Kwalski, Davis, one each side, grab and pull on three, the rest of you, cover us” He ordered.

“One, Two, Three, pull!” Kwalski shouted after getting some purchase on the sliding mechanism. The door slowly came open and a cloud of thick Mist floating out, dissipating and joining that which currently surrounded them. Ruffshot fired his net gun into the small chamber and a shrill screaming sound came out of the dark. Kwalski jumped in swinging the butt of his gun. They heard a squelching crack of metal on flesh and then silence. Kwalski emerged from the Hem-Seal, pulling the net taught over his shoulder and dragging out its content.

“Looks like we got one,” He said enthusiastically, some of the men turning from their cover fire position to have a look at the trapped beast.

“Didn’t put up much of a fight this one.” Ruffshot said as he walked over, lowering his gun.

“Must have been deprived of blood,” Push replied.

“The other one looked like it had just fed, it must have bagged someone hiding just as you moved in, or slightly before, that means there’s the possibility of further civilian survivors, so keep alert.” Michaels said to the men making his continual presence known.

“...And consider how strong the other one was in comparison, be weary, don’t take chances, now, keep the one you’ve got alive, kill everything else you see, move out to the Mist-Lung at Green Lake Park.” Push relayed to the men, who were already moving out. Kwalski dragging his limp catch, the other men shifting their sight constantly, watching for their enemy, both Ghost and Vampire.

The Mist from their earlier bombing efforts was beginning to thin as they reached Green Park. They all continued to march forward in silence as the enormous Mist Lung came into view in the distance. Push watched through Ruffshot’s eyes and remembered

how, just earlier this morning, he'd longed to see one again, well, he thought, careful what you wish for.

"Davis, reconnaissance, you've got five minutes, I want to know where the entrance is to this thing and enemy numbers," Ruffshot ordered. Private Davis shot off through the Mist, running with his sniper rifle braced against his chest.

Push crackled over the comms-stream. "Right, Ruffshot, you're going to have to go inside the Mist Lung, it'll help us figure out what exactly has been happening here. I want you to move in, hook yourself up to the stream-panel in the production centre and get all the data you can. You won't be able to pull up a map, the layout of the Mist Lung's is classified 'top-secret', I'm not sure if Colonels clearance can even get access to them?" he questioned.

"No, unfortunately not, only the highest ranking GIA officials get access to the Mist ling blue-prints, the bastards," Michaels replied.

"Okay, well, I can guide you to it, I was involved in the layout of the first Mist Lungs and they all pretty much follow the same course. Stay sharp men, the workers at the Lungs are probably the people to experience these rapid mutations, the Lung controllers and engineers being exposed to the most potent form of Mist on a daily basis. It makes sense that if there was going to be mutations anywhere, they'd be here."

"Right men, you heard him, in tight, stay alert, we're likely to experience hostiles, Davis, what you got?" Ruffshot asked.

Private Davis crackled through on their comms stream, panting from his run, "Sir, no enemies in sight, entrance located, but if you thought what we saw at the other Herm-Seal was a big deal, wait to you get a load of this." He crackled back out.

"Forward, pick up the pace!" Ruffshot ordered as he entered into a light jog, Kwalski still dragging their unconscious bounty and the rest of the men following. Slowly through

the thinning Mist, exposing the huge base of the Lung, and what lay around it.

“Jesus, what happened here?” Ruffshot growled in his course voice the carnage slowly revealing itself as they approached, steadily.

“Last stand, a god damn massacre,” Michael’s replied as he watched the live stream from Ruffshots Goggles. His head turning, he stopped, trying to absorb what lay ahead of them.

“Looks like as the Mist dissipated, the remaining humans barricaded themselves around this, mother.” Kwalski spoke with clear emotion in his voice and pointed at the base of the Mist Lung. “Looks like they were trying to get the last bit of protection from the Ghosts and from these fuckers,” he turned and kicked the sack he had been dragging.

“Yeah, but it didn’t do much fucking good did it? The merciless blood sucking bastards have torn them apart,” Ruffshot replied coming to a halt as Davis came running back to them.

“Sir, it’s like this all the way around, I’ve found a route in, but it’s not pretty.” Davis said.

“Good work private, back in formation.” Ruffshot replied, turning to his men, crouching to the ground, grabbing a handful of dirt and looking up and around. They were surrounded by silence. Ruffshot and Kwalski had seen action before the Mist had settled. They were regular marine vets that had requested transfers to the Ghost marines, both having lost family members to the Ghost threat, full of rage and the need for revenge, they got their transfers without question. Good men were needed and these were the best, real brutes, when they weren’t killing men, they were drinking beer or practicing to kill men, they got in, fucked shit up and got the fuck out. But their traditional mode of battle changed when the Ghosts came.

They were involved in some of the first, highly unsuccessful counter attacks, under

prepared they tried facing an enemy that they knew little about and in the blind panic billions were lost, globally. Countries with no technology fell within days, unable to protect themselves and the first world nations, too worried about their own kin, failed to provide any help.

Hiding under the Mist was the only option and so that's what Humanity did, ran away. It made them both furious, there was no honour in hiding, but there was nothing they could do about it. The Corps continued to fail at safely weaponizing the Mist as an attack weapon, and so they had to defend rather than attack. They both wanted their planet back, but they were warriors, not scientists, and so they had to wait for developments.

"Fucking bastards, I've not seen anything like this since Frisco fell in 2028, piled up bodies, without injury, but nothing to them. Soulless, the Ghosts coming in and just scooping their neural activity right out of them. God damn it, now we've got fucking blood sucking vampires to deal with as well. What the hell are we up against here? Look at this fucking mess, kids torn up bodies, people turned into vampires, men without minds, everything fucking dead. It's a fucking catastrophe. Push, you let me know where to go when I need to and we'll start to work on making this mess right," Ruffshot voiced to his men, rising up straight and patting the dirt off his sweat-suit gloves.

"That's why we're here Ruffshot, we all feel the same way" Push replied, "You do your job, and I'll do mine."

"Right let's get to this. Men, the entrance Davis found is the only way in or out of this place. The likelihood of hostiles inside is significantly less than out here. Kwalski and I will move in, you stay at the Herm-Seal and make sure nothing gets through it. We don't want any of those things thinking there's fresh meat and getting any ideas. We'll grab the data, get to the extraction point, get the fuck out of here and figure out what the fuck has happened, and just what the hell we're going to do about it." Ruffshot sounded off,

completely in charge, brain tight, ready to do his duty.

They made their way through the piled corpses and into the entrance Davis had found. Jiggling the Herm-Seal open carefully net gun at the ready, it was empty and they moved in.

“Here, Davis, take care of my pet, he can get angry, but don’t worry, his bark is worse than his bite, or is that the other way around?” Kwalski dropped the sack to Davis, patted him on the shoulder and turned to follow Ruffshot, chuckling through the comms stream as he went.

“Thanks Kwalski!” Davis replied, plunging the butt of his gun into the head of the beast inside the sack, turning to Foster, raising his gun and aiming at the door, bracing himself.

Ruffshot and Kwalski were running through the corridors of the Mist Lung, making their way to the control centre, trying to dodge the bodies that lay all over the floor.

“Look, Push, Colonel, you getting this? We’ve got remnants of Mist in here, it’s largely dissipated now, but what the hell is it doing inside?” Ruffshot said.

“Get close to one of the dead vamps for a second Ruffshot,” Push asked and the corporal did, moving into what was once an engineer, lay on the floor face down. He turned him to expose his burnt face. The victims body was covered by a boiler suit, but its face was exposed, blistered and melted.

“See, the mutation must have brought about extreme sensitivity to UV light. This guy worked all day every day outside, in the Mist around the Lung, repairing and tinkering. He, more than anyone, had a lack of UV in his life,” Push said to the men.

“Yeah, and he’s come in here, and the UV lights have melted him to death, fucker. What a way to go.” Kwalski replied, poking the burnt mans face with the barrel of his gun.

“Quit it Kwalski,” Ruffshot pushed him away and leant into the body. “Look, what’s

this in his hand? Shit. These are grenade pins, from Mist grenades. What the hell?"

"Ruffshot, move into the generator area, it's approximately 100 feet away from here, down the corridor, to the right, you can't miss it." Push replied.

The men started running again, neither entirely sure why they had been told to move off so fast but neither had a problem with following the order. Push had proved himself to them over the last few hours. Ruffshot kicked the big double doors of the generator room open, simultaneously both men ran in, guns locked into their shoulders, ready to fire.

"No shit, so, that guy...?" Kwalski began.

"That's right, he used Mist grenades from the Armoury to move around inside the Lung, creating panic, eating people at will." Push followed up Kwalski's inclination. "And look, Ruffshot move into the generator."

He did so, "These are Mist Marines, they've been eaten, looks like they took out the Lung themselves, look at these explosion marks." Ruffshot continued to walk around the internal workings of the Lung, more bodies and more signs of explosions.

"Must have been one hell of a fight, they didn't stand a chance. They had to fight hand-to-hand, they didn't have any projectile weapons, they had no idea what they were getting into, those bastard GIA." Kwalski said, stood aiming at the door.

"That's right, no one's got out alive. Fuck. Ruffshot, see if you can use that terminal over to the right, if that one works, no need to get to the command centre." Push replied as the corporal ran over. Grabbing his extension cord he hooked himself up to the terminal, it sprang to life, sucking power from his sweat-suit and feeding him with information gathered from every aspect of the Mist-Lung, from journal entries of employees to CCTV recordings.

"Excellent, it's working," The colonel said. "Push, any ideas about that engineer with

the grenade pins? That would surely denote some level of intelligence, but the one we saw, looking like a rabid animal?”.

“You’re right Mann, although the mutation brings the victim down to an almost primordial level of intelligence, they must retain some memory. I bet, once we get the information back from the corporals download, we’ll see how that engineer or one like him was responsible for taking out the comms-stream from this Lung, and I bet the same thing happened across each all this Mist Lungs where ever there were mutations. They mutate and they take out the comms-streams so they could go about their business undetected, then the first battalion of Mist Marines arrived. They took out the Lungs, only equipped to face Ghosts, thinking they stood more of a chance with them, thinking they could help out the people that were left, the Ghosts came down, wiped everything out, the remaining vamps died from either Ghost attack or UV exposure, any civilians left didn’t stand a chance. The whole city fell in less than 24 hours. What a cluster fuck.”

“Steady, Push, keep it together, the men on the ground still need you don’t forget that,” the Colonel replied with an air of authority.

There comms streams crackled, “Sir, whatever you’re doing, do it fast, the Mist is thinning by the second, we need to get the hell to the rendezvous point ASAFP,” Davis said.

“He’s right,” Push replied, “The ship is collecting up units as we speak, you have 15 minutes men, get the hell out of there.”

“Done!” Ruffshot yelled, “Right, Kwalski, get your running shoes on, we’re gone.” He started sprinting for the door.

“Wait!” Kwalski ran over to the other side of the room, grabbing a belt of Mist grenades off a fallen Marine. “We might need some more of these.”

They were quickly back with Davis and Foster at the entrance. Kwalski grabbed the

still unconscious body off the floor and out of the herm-seal in a single motion, following Ruffshot up ahead.

“Foster, this is where you come into play, you and that Mist canister gun of yours, take the lead, stay alert, we’ll need cover all the way to the Medical Centre, I want a nice corridor of Mist for us to run through. Colonel, we’re on our way, t-minus 20 minutes, can you hold that long?!” Ruffshot yelled as they paced through the thinning Mist.

“Not a problem corporal, just get your ass over here as soon as humanly possible,” the colonel said, the Bubble-Ship having landed and receiving its troops. Casualties were minimal, three men lost so far to vampire attacks, no civilians found alive.

The Dirty Dogs sprinted toward the Medical Centre rendezvous point, looking around at the carnage of the city. Death swept through here with no regard for the innocent, Ruffshot thought. He wanted to spit but his sweat-suit hood stopped him from doing so. Foster was out in front, firing canisters of Mist in a perfect arc, lining them up, creating a shroud for them to continually run through.

They could see the Ghost threat on the outside the thin corridor of Mist they had created for themselves. Their purple plasma glow firing like electricity as they came into contact with the Mist, totally silent as always, mesmerising to look at, astonishing and beautiful. Humanoid in shape, flying and floating, no distinguishable features, like a blank slate, all the makings of a person, but without face or personality, just their hollow eye sockets distinguishing the outline of a face.

“I told you they wouldn’t let me down Push, now, lets get the fuck out of here,” the Colonel said, standing. “Ruffshot, I’ll see you and your men in the loading bay, we’ll need to get that body you’re carrying up to the medical suite as soon as possible, Colonel Michaels out.” He disconnected his cord from his Goggle mask and turned to walk out of the command room.

“Come on Push, don’t let what you saw get to you, we’ve done the right thing here, lots of work do be done.”

“You’re right,” Push replied, but will it do any good, he silently thought.

Chapter 4 – It is called ‘Tokyo Collider’

“Get the fuck in here!” Colonel Michaels shouted to the sprinting marines as they ran through their corridor of Mist, fired into the air by Davis.

Seconds later they were in the protective bubble surrounding their transport ship, its engines primed and ready, Kwalski bringing up the rear, the unconscious vampire over his shoulder, they hit the loading bay ramp and the ship lifted off. Its powerful engines pushing them off the ground, the pilot let off a Mist Pulse around the ship that expanded their bubble by 100% for a split second, twice the size of normal, it melted any of the Ghost threat in the immediate vicinity allowing for an easier and safer take off.

“Fuck,” Ruffshot panted as he leant over in his sweat-suit, hands on his knees, trying to catch his breath. “Good work men, you did the dirty-dogs proud, now to the Armoury for suit recharge, no time to hang around, fuck knows what’s going to happen next.” He said, catching his breath, the rest of his men stood around him in the loading bay.

“My sentiments exactly men, get your shit together, we’re heading back to New York as we speak, we’ve got a lot of work on our hands.” The Colonel spoke, walking up to the men, Push following behind with two medical technicians.

“Good work with that beast Kwalski, Push will take it from here, I’ll see you all get commendations for your work today, what you have done could very well save the lives of many people. Let’s just hope we get the answer in time. Push, do what you do best.”

“I’m on it Colonel, thanks again men, Ruffshot, excellent work. I’m going to spend an hour examining the specimen and debrief the entire battalion,” Push replied.

“No problem Burrows, hey, we make a half decent team, just make sure it’s not a wasted effort.” Ruffshot growled as he and his men moved off into the Armoury to

resupply their sweat-suits and share the experience with the other men.

Push walked over to the netted creature on the floor, injecting it with potent mix of anaesthesia agents, he had no idea what would work but he'd rather have it dead than waking up. The technicians picked it up, putting it on a wheeled medical bed, they moved it through to the sick-bay of the ship.

Push changed the gloves and Goggles of his sweat-suit from military grade combat to military grade medical. The Goggles had different capabilities, working with the innards of a human body in the Mist, rather than working to target the enemy. The gloves were thinner, the fingers more nimble, allowing doctors and surgeons to operate with grater ease. He was prepped and he created a Herm-Bubble around the operating table where the vampire lay. It sucked out the Mist that was inside, allowing him to see what he was doing, whilst retaining the shield of Mist that was in the room.

"Right, the mouth, lets see what you've got in here," Push began. He pulled the jaw down and open, exposing the fanged teeth inside.

"Jesus wept, this fucking things mouth is still full of blood," he said with distaste, scooping out dead flesh and blood to expose the teeth more clearly. "Okay, computer, stream medical notes directly to Colonel Mann Michaels, store and send to Push Burrows stream-plate. Begin." He started, fingering the mouth. "Central and lateral incisors seem unchanged, moving round, upper canine are extended to over an inch, must be to allow deep penetration for the ingestion of blood. Magnified through my Goggles you can clearly see how the ends have intravenous barbs. Wait, this is interesting, the teeth are hollow. Goggles X-ray." His Goggles switched to X-ray vision and he could see the complete skeletal structure of the specimen in front of him.

"My god. Like I hypothesised, these beasts don't ingest blood in a traditional vampire sense, they suck the blood out through their canines, and it enters directly into

their own bloodstream. Thickening their own blood and combating the thinning effects of the Mist on their own.” He reached his hand into the mouth and snapped one of the teeth out, holding it up to his Goggles.

“Biological analysis.” He waited as the results came in. “Shit, the mutation, this jump in their genetic make up. They can drink other blood and filter it, turning it into their own blood-type, allowing them to survive on any blood available, as long as it’s human. I bet they clean the blood from disease and viruses as well, incredible. If we get out the other side of this mess, we might even utilize these mutations for our benefit. Side-note, there is no indication this is viral either, it is mutation, they are vampiric in nature, but are not entirely like what we’ve seen in books and movies for so many years, so some good news at least. However, their further mutations, including heightened senses and strength make it more efficient at sustaining their blood lust in the Mist, more physical analysis is needed--”

His comms-stream crackled, “Push, you better get up here, quick, something’s happened,” The Colonel spoke with a sombre tone.

“But, I’m in the middle of my examination,” he questioned the Colonel.

“Push, just get the fuck up here, now!” Michaels reacted badly before crackling back out.

“Right, erm, technicians! Carry on my analysis, keep streaming everything to my stream-plate, I want full reports on skin reaction and biology, muscle mass, brain reactivity and more information on their metabolic mechanism. I want it yesterday, get to work.” He changed his Goggles and gloves back to military combat grade and ran to the command centre.

Running through the sliding door he saw Colonel Michaels and Corporal Ruffshot’s floating eyes at the end of the room, both sat, hooked up to the command panel.

“What the hell is going on Mann?” Push demanded.

“It’s New York Push, it’s the whole god damned continent, there’s mutations happening everywhere, cities under siege, we’re only getting bits through here and there. Vague reports, but it seems the cities of both east and west seaboard have had Ghost Contamination Protocol level 1 put on them. This has just started to come through as we’ve been in the air..” The Colonel replied, Push could hear his grinding teeth through his comms stream.

“Holy fuck, what....what the hell, what about Elizabeth and Libby? What the fuck is going on?!” Push shouted, stumbling over his words with shock as he ran over to the command-panel hooking himself up, and sitting down.

“Look Push, it’s all going to hell, mixed reports of mass Mist-Lung failure, the Mist Gendarmerie can’t cope, they don’t have enough numbers. People are fleeing the cities to get away from the Vampire mutations, and getting slaughtered in the Mistless badlands. Complete panic, chaos, most comms-streams are down, I’m trying to get through to the NAGMC bases across the country and getting very little back. We’re losing the battle here Push. We’re losing!” The Colonel cried out.

“I can’t get through to Elizabeth! This can’t be happening, such a rapid rate, what the hell set this off? Elizabeth, Jesus, and Libby. I hope she just did what she was told and has stayed in the apartment, she’s a clever girl. She’ll know what to do, she’ll know what to do, she’ll know what to do,” Push kept saying over and over as he witnessed the carnage streaming through from the news-streams. Mist-Lungs on fire, the Mist thinning, people getting slaughtered by the vampires, physical war again with guns and grenades and axes, people fighting with anything they could get their hands on. Blind panic. And the ones that chose to run, having their brain-electricity scooped out by Ghosts. It was almost too much to watch.

“Push, I saw some of your findings, the technicians are getting on with more now, we need to get to the GIA headquarters and let them know what we have, they’re probably trying to coordinate everyone at the moment. If I can get access to their comms-stream-network, Push, I might be able to rescue something out of this fucking mess, it’s the only choice we’ve got. I know for sure those swine are going to fuck this up and then that’s the end of us all.”

“I’m going after Elizabeth and Libby, Mann,” Push said adamantly to the Colonel.

“Push, look I know how you must be feeling but...”

“You’ve got no fucking idea how I’m feeling Mann! You’re not the one with a pregnant wife and a 4 year old daughter trapped in a fucking apartment surrounded by ghosts, vampires and crazy fuckers with guns!” Push jumped up, pulling his tether out of the command-panel.

“Look, Push, I’ve not got any spare scout ships, and I can’t spare any men, you’ll get to New York and you’ll die, you’re not a field man! Push, you might be smart as shit, but on the ground you wouldn’t last five minutes, and what fucking use would you be then? You’re coming to Boston with us to the GIA HQ and you’re going to help me organise and figure out how to sort this mess out. Like you said, Elizabeth is a clever girl, as long as she says put she can survive for days in your apartment, she’s got UV protection and emergency Mist rations if she needs them. You’re high up, you know you were first to get the new accommodation, she’s better off than most right now!” Colonel replied, having disconnected himself from his streams, grabbed Push by the shoulders and shaking him.

“Get off me! Christ!” Push replied, dropping to his knees, holding his hooded head in his gloved hands, he was breathing heavily, trying to compose himself.

The Colonel walked over and placed a hand on his shoulder, squeezing gently.

“You know there’s only one way of doing this, Push, lets get the job done.”

“I’ll—I’ll gather my data together for reporting to you and the GIA,” He finally answered. “There’s got to be a way out of this.” He looked up, still breathing heavily, trying to hold back his emotion the room filled with the sound of gripping and relaxing fabric, as he clenched his fists over and over.

Push was still analysing the data from his time studying the Vampire as the Bubble-Ship arrived at GIA head-quarters, at the Boston New State House.

“Erm, Sir, what should we do with this, there’s still a pulse, should we incinerate it before it wakes up?” One of the medical technicians said to him with an air of trepidation as he exited.

“Yes, immediate termination by incinerator.” He turned to them. “I don’t want that thing waking up and getting loose in the ship, or god forbid in the GIA head-quarters. I’ve got pretty much everything I need from here.” He finished, leaving the surgical theatre, stream-plate in hand, reading through the collected data and making his way to the loading bay.

“Arh, excellent, we’re about to disembark.” The colonel raised his head as Push entered. “We’re still unable to get through to the GIA HQ, either they’ve been cut off or there’s nothing left of them, either way it’s not good.” He continued. “You should have seen the city on the way in, Push. Our scout-buoys picked up huge areas full of dead bodies, especially around mist-lungs, just like we saw in Seattle. The place is in chaos, everything’s in chaos...Shit...I’m sure she’ll be alright, Push” He stopped talking.

“No, don’t worry, we’ve got a fighting chance once we get into this HQ.” Push replied quietly.

“Whatever we come up with I’m sure it’s going to be a damn sight better than what these feckless GIA have got, god damn assholes. Anyway, listen up, their HQ isn’t

equipped for ships the size of ours. We have to touch down a few hundred yards away and work our way up. We used up all of our Mist-Shells on Seattle so we're going to have to move up in fire teams. We're going first, with the Dirty-Dogs. They'll get us in and safe, no doubt about it. Don't worry Push, once we're inside, we'll get this fucking this sorted out." Michaels said as he pointed to the far side of the loading bay at the Dirty-Dogs.

Corporal Ivan Ruffshot, Lance Corporal Benjamin 'Neck-snapper' Kwalski, Specialist James Foster and Private Dwayne Davis all stood, talking, weapons in hands, ready to do their duty. They'd been successful on their previous mission, to extract a living vampire specimen from Seattle, Push thought. He just hoped they didn't think of him as some dickhead pencil pusher with too many ideas and not enough balls. He walked over with the Colonel, through the hundreds of other Ghost Marines from the 105th Battalion, all prepping themselves to move into the GIA HQ.

"Colonel!" Ruffshot sounded off, saluting, his men completely in-sync, he gave a nod to Push, as they walked over. "What are we dealing with here, Sir?" He asked, just about audible over busy bay.

"Well, Ruffshot, like you were briefed, you and your men are the lead team, touch down is in approximately 3 minutes and we'll be out the loading bay doors. It's a straight run to the GIA HQ. We're leaving the Mist-Buggies here to transport the rest of the men once we're inside." He clasped his hands together. "The Mist is almost non-existent around here, our scans indicate the vampires seem to be in large numbers, so imagine what you were up against in Seattle, just a whole lot worse. We're fresh out of luck and time, we need in that building as soon as possible. No screw-ups."

"I'm not sure I've ever heard of a screw-up Colonel, it's not part of my vocabulary." Ruffshot said, cocking his heavy projectile weapon.

“Well, don’t get clever Corporal, we’re once again up against something new, remember last time we all got cocky and almost lost our shit?” The Colonel replied, not needing an answer, moving over to the loading bay ramp.

Ruffshot looked down at the floor and drew a deep breath, prepping himself for the run. He could remember the past only too well, and he winced silently inside his sweat-suit as they moved to their exit. Three of them with heavy projectile weapons, Specialist Foster with his Mist canister launcher, Push and the Colonel behind them moving up.

“Touch-down in t-minus 5-4-3-2-1,” the ship’s pilot counted them down through their comms-stream. The Bubble-Ship bumped off the ground on the final number and the loading bay ramp quickly opened, dropping to the floor with pneumatic pistons firing.

A moment of complete stillness washed over them. Complete silence, they stood at the top of the ramp, motionless. They could see outside the ship’s protective Bubble, they could see the entrance 100 yards away without any aid of their Goggles, quiet and desolate. Bodies were scattered around, pools of blood, a horror to the eyes, but not quite as bad as what they had seen outside the Mist-Lung in Seattle.

"Forward!" Ruffshot shouted, breaking the air’s eerie silence as he shot off down the ramp, taking the lead the rest of the team followed. Heavy military boots clattering on the metal, Foster fired in first canister in a perfect arc, landing just outside the Bubble-Ship’s protective layer and shooting the beginning of their path through to the HQ into the air.

“Incoming!” Kwalski shouted as he scanned, seeing half a dozen or so vampires running at them from either side of the mist corridor that was being laid out by Foster as they ran.

“Don’t stop! Open fire!” Ruffshot responded, aiming and shooting two of the incoming enemy in quick succession. A natural dead-eye, when combined with the aim-bot

of his Goggles he never missed. He took out another one before he heard a shout from behind, turning to run backwards, he saw Kwalski on the ground again.

“You mother fucker! Where the fuck did you come from! Back to hell you fuck!” Kwalski screamed filling the beast with the lead of his gun. No longer taken back by the terrifying nature of the beast, he was able to quickly wrestle it off him in his weakened state.

“Get up Kwalski! Stop fucking around!” Ruffshot shouted as they reached the entrance, raising his gun and taking aim. Push saw the barrel glowing red through his Goggles and ducked, jumping forward to the ground toward the entrance thinking Ruffshot had mistaken him for a vampire. He heard the shot and felt the vampire fall onto his back, a dead weight.

“Don’t worry about it.” The corporal said, kicking the body off Push’s back and grabbing him to help him up. Davis took up the rear, taking out another two running toward them with a quick spray of bullets and skidding into the GIA HQ as Foster and Kwalski slammed and barred shut the heavy doors of the New State House entrance.

“Quick, over to the herm-seal, we need to get below ground now!” the colonel shouted at everyone. He knew that the GIA HQ had a back up layer of Mist constantly surrounding its deep underground bunker. “Kwalski, Foster, bypass their security protocols, and get the seal to the emergency stair well open. We’ll need to get down manually, but we’ll be safe down there, the Ghost threat is still highly likely to get us here and it won’t be long before those bastards outside figure out another route in here.”

The vampires outside continued to try and break through the door, they could be heard scrabbling over the great dome of the House.

“Done, let’s get the hell out of here.” Foster said, holding the herm-seal door open with Kwalski and motioning for everyone to get inside. Push and the Colonel moved

through first, sprinting down the steps as fast as they could without falling over. Soon they entered through the underground HQ perma-bubble that surrounded the entire underground GIA base with a permanent cloud of Mist where there were openings for rooms and offices. They ran down the final steps arriving at the secured entrance to the actual base.

“What a rush,” Push panted as the rest of the men came clambering down the steps to the bottom. The large sliding doors in front of them shot open and a dozen Mist Gendarmerie shot out with projectile weapons, quickly surrounding the men.

“Wait!” The colonel shouted as the Dirty-Dogs raised their arms, ready for combat. “Stand down men! Look, we’re not mutated, I’m Colonel Mann Michaels, check my Goggle ident. We’re here with the 105th TGR Battalion, we went to Seattle to find out what the hell was going on and by the time we figured it out, the whole country has flared up! This man with me is a scientist, he has vital information on the Vampiric Threat!” The Colonel shouted at the silent Mist Guards as their guns wavered.

“Arh, Colonel Michaels, I was wondering what your next move would be.” The uneasy standoff was broken by a figure walking through the doorway, individual from everyone else in the room. His completely white sweat-suit bore the Cerberus Insignia of the GIA.

“Oh fuck,” the Colonel said, almost disappointingly. “Wiseman. I should have known, what the hell is going on here. Get your men to stand down. We’re not mutated, we need the capabilities of your base to co-ordinate our counter attack. We have vital information to the effort, to whatever counter-effort has already been launched. What the fuck are you up to Wiseman?!” The colonel forced his way through the Mist-Guards circle, leaving the other men surrounded, walking straight up to the visibly shorter GIA Head

Jeremiah Wiseman.

“Always so hot tempered Colonel. You’ve not changed. Come. Men stand down. We’ve not got a lot of time. Everyone, back to work.” Wiseman said, as the Mist-Guards dispersed, marching quickly back through the large sliding doors.

“I didn’t know the Colonel knew the Head of the GIA?” Ruffshot said, in a direct comms-stream to Push as they moved to follow everyone inside the HQ.

“Wiseman and Michaels trained together, before Wiseman dropped out to follow a career in intelligence. They’ve hated each other ever since. The Colonel broke his nose in a bar fight before the Mist came down,” Push replied.

“No shit!” Ruffshot laughed as they continued walking. The base was a mass of intelligence officers running around in their purple sweat suits, all holding on to and tapping away at stream-plates. Complete chaos, no one seemed to know what was going on. Obedient Mist-Guards lined the walls, stood motionless, guns mounted on their shoulders.

“What’s going on Wiseman, what are you working on? Our man here, Push, he’s...”

“Arh yes, Push Burrows,” Wiseman quickly broke in as they walked through the madness, “One of the original Saint Albert Collaboratory Science and Military Program scientists. Graduated from MIT with honours. Daughter Libby Burrows, 3 years old, wife of 10 years, Elizabeth Burrows, currently pregnant with your second child. Currently head of Mist-Production for the North-American continent and close acquaintance with our mutual friend here, Colonel Mann Michaels. It is a pleasure.”

“Cut the shit!” The Colonel stopped, grabbing Wiseman by the shoulder and turning him to face him. “I’ve got a 1000 strong TGR Battalion above ground, I’m here to requisition this base and use it as a military command-centre to coordinate our counter-attack effort against the vampiric threat.”

“Michaels, Michaels, so behind with the times.” He brushed off the grip and turned to walk into his office. “You men, you must stay out here,” Wiseman gestured toward the Dirty-Dogs. They looked at their Colonel.

“It’s okay men, lets see what he has to say. It better be good Wiseman.” They moved into Wiseman’s large office.

“Extract.” Wiseman said and the mist in the room was quickly sucked out. “Don’t worry, we’re quite safe here.” Wiseman said as he removed the hood of his sweat suite, revealing a small, old, rounded face, bald head with half ring of grey hair around the back. He lifted a small pair of perfectly round spectacles and pushed them onto his brow. The Colonel and Push both removed their hoods.

“Right, what the fuck have we got here Wiseman? Don’t mind do you?” The colonel said as he stuffed a cigar into the side of his mouth and lit it up. “Good. Push tell the man what you know.”

Push rubbed the sweat out of his tired eyes and breathed in, “Well, we’re in trouble, but depending on numbers, what’s left around the nation in terms of military and Gendarmerie support, there’s a chance humanity might not get wiped off the face of the North American continent. I can’t speak for the rest of the planet of course. If we can find a cure for the mutation, we can get it out and the men we have can keep the vampires at bay, we can get through this. It’s not viral so at least it can’t be transmitted. They are superior in strength and sensory capabilities, but the mutation reduces cognitive capabilities to that of a young child. We know they’re vulnerable to UV light and can be killed with projectile based weapons. They need blood to survive and will attack to get it. That’s what I’ve got a handle on so far, what do you know?”

Wiseman stood up from behind his desk clapping slowly, “Well done, well done. You’re not as slow as I had thought Colonel, you’ve obviously got quite a partner here.

Now, let me inform you on what's really going on." He walked around the desk, as a large screen rolled out from the ceiling behind him. "You're right when you say we're in trouble, but you're also right when you say not all is lost. Your biological assessment is spot on. However, co-ordination efforts so far between the Ghost Intelligence Agency and the North American Ghost Marine Corps have failed. Partly because your Generals have decided abandon governmental structure and have instigated a military coup. This is not all bad, they have gone about capturing all the major cities and have been protecting the inhabitants successfully and I have ordered my Mist-Gendarmerie to stand down for the time being. However, the Marines cannot hold out forever. The mutations keep happening and they don't have the scientific know how to combat it at its source."

"Holy shit, a coup, I had no idea," The Colonel interjected, his eyes widening.

"Yes well, comms-streams have been largely terminated by the vampiric threat, some random babble is getting through from spurious news agencies, but it's pretty much a national black out. Power, Mist production and Comms have all been brought to their knees. We have a direct line established with General Ironhans, but negotiations have broken down, he's refusing to listen or communicate with us. This is where you might be able to help Colonel." Wiseman sat on the desk.

"Why would I help, you, if the Generals have started a coup me and my men will follow them, they're doing the job now, you just said yourself," The Colonel replied, puffing heavily on his cigar.

"Yes, but the point is they won't last! They don't have the capacity to fight the Vampiric Threat, the Ghost Threat, restore Mist and find a cure to the Vampiric threat, it's just not possible!" Wiseman said, infuriated by Michaels' military posturing.

"I suppose you have an answer?" Push moved in, trying to restore some civility to the situation.

“Yes I do Push. What I have to show you has been top-secret since the Mist fell, but there is little logic in keeping it that way any more. I will dispense with any other pleasantries, this, gentlemen, is Tokyo Collider.” The screen behind Wiseman sprang into life. It showed a creature in a laboratory of some sort, Mist free, it was hard to tell what was going on. A scientist in a white coat moved into the camera shot, revealing the beasts size by adding perspective, the scientist continued to walk in before turning to face the camera. His head was just below the right knee of what he was standing in front of.

“It is called Tokyo Collider.” The scientist stated in a very matter of fact way, his arms folded and a ridged expression on his face. Its gigantic frame was humanoid in structure, with enormous muscle definition and grey moist looking skin that gave it a sheen under the UV light of the massive laboratory. It seemed to be sleeping, its huge chest rising up and down as it lay back, upright, but at a slightly relaxed angle against a massive metal slab. Its arms and legs bound at the wrists and ankles by huge metal rungs.

“This is the GIA’s experimental weapon to combat and eradicate the Ghost threat. We have genetically engineered Tokyo Collider to be the perfect super soldier. It is invulnerable to Ghost.” The scientist stated, walking to its side, stepping onto a platform that rose about 30feet, to the beasts head. “Its gigantic size allows for an ultra-thick porous skull, filled with Mist, Ghosts cannot penetrate its mind to harvest its electrical bio-energy. Thus it is impervious to the threat.” The scientist continued as Push and the Colonel looked on in amazement, walking around Wiseman’s desk and up close to the large screen.

“Its internal organs act in a similar way to the Mist-Lungs that provide us with protection today, only in a much more efficient manner. Carrying two, 1000 cubic litre, cylinders of pure oxygen, Tokyo Collider can manufacture 100,000 cubic litres of Mist.” The scientist lowered the platform back to the ground and walked away from Tokyo

Collider, moving it out of shot, over to what looked like two huge metallic chrome pieces of pipe, with smaller, just as shiny pipes coming off them along their length. “With the specially designed and manufactured weaponry we have here,” he patted a hand against one of the pipes, “Tokyo Collider can effectively combat the Ghost threat. Its respiratory system pushes the Mist it creates through these Mist-Engines, which super heat and fire the Mist much greater distances than ever achieved, with almost pin-point accuracy. Like a jet of Mist that can tare through the Ghost threat”

“I’ve seen enough!” The colonel turned to Wiseman, slamming his hand down onto the desk and chewing on his cigar. “Why the hell weren’t we told about this sooner?! Why hasn’t it been deployed yet?” He demanded

“There have been, problems...” Wiseman gestured.

“What sort of problems?” Push eyed him.

“On a cognitive level. We had to design the creatures brain, do you realise how hard that is? This thing isn’t a computer, it’s a living organism, we tried running it off a computer and it just didn’t work, the computer could be programmed but was bad at reacting to situations. To combat the Ghost Threat you need intuition,” Wiseman said, walking back around his desk and sitting down.

“Damn straight you do!” The Colonel shouted again.

“Well, we’ve almost perfected it. Right now it’s essentially as clever as an average human male, which is perfect for our situation. However, there have been cases of extreme mental reaction, the human mind is not perfect, and the one we’ve grown in a laboratory is far from it. But we’ve worked out most of the problems.” Wiseman clasped his hands on top of the desk, looking up and down, shifting his focus nervously.

“You-sick-fuck,” the Colonel spat slowly, “You’re down here playing God whilst people are up there in the Mist, trying to live, trying to scrape together an existence...”

“We’ve not got time to argue!” Push interjected. “Look, people are dying up there, as we speak my pregnant wife and young daughter are probably in my apartment, surrounded by emergency Mist rations, terrified, not knowing if I’m alive or dead, not knowing if anyone will come for them! Damn it, we need to do whatever we can to right this!” He finished, slamming his balled fist down on the desk in between Wiseman and Michaels. Both men slightly taken-aback by Push’s reaction, Wiseman turned to the screen behind him.

“Look, Colonel, this is why I need you to cooperate...just let me finish and you can call me whatever you want, take this base and try to coordinate a futile resistance against something you don’t have the resource or knowledge to fight effectively.” Wiseman said, his back to them both, looking up at the screen and cleaning his glasses. The camera’s focus had moved back to Tokyo Collider still bound and seemingly asleep. The beast’s chest rhythmically pumped up and down, small flares of Mist coming out of its massive nostrils followed by the occasional deep rumbling growl.

“Like I was saying, we’ve had some cognitive problems, but I believe we’ve worked most of them out now. We have a 98% battle ready unit here and in all the major cities across the North American continent. Alongside the Tokyo Collider lead units we have 1000 strong battalions of genetically altered soldiers especially selected from the Mist Gendarmerie ranks. They’re willing to fight and highly efficient at killing, but they’re not trained, they’re not experienced in combat the way your Mist Marines are Colonel. What we have got here and across the country is the most fearsome military machine in the history of man, but with no one to guide it.” Wiseman span back round on his chair to Michaels and Push with focused eyes.

“I see where you’re going here, you want our men to lead and fight alongside your atrocity against nature?” The colonel replied, lifting an eyebrow.

“It’s not an atrocity, but that’s exactly it. We need your experience with your men to lead these soldiers in the field of battle against this threat. Our projections show, that with a combination of forces, the vampiric threat as it stands now will be neutralised and back under control in about the amount of time it’s taken for it to tare our cities apart. About 72 hours. In the mean time we’re working round the clock to find a preventative measure against the vampiric mutation. Once the numbers are under control though, well if that happens before we find a cure, our super soldiers can patrol round the clock to clean up any further mutations, whilst you take care of everything else. Restoring power, getting Mist production back up and running, everything we need to survive.”

“Well?” Push clicked his fingers at the Colonel.

“Well, one flaw Wiseman, your beast is equipped for Mist combat, not projectile weapon based combat, what the dammed hell use is it firing Mist at a vampire that’s going to chew it to bits?” Michaels retorted.

“Arh, yes, well, you see, we have that under control. In our planning we thought ahead; the second stage Tokyo Collider development would involve building projectile based weapons for defensive purposes, as a precaution you see, against possible invasions from other countries. Your numbers are low, we made the back up.”

“Bullshit...there’s barely been 10 words of international diplomacy verbalised since the Global Mist Armistice, when the Mist first fell. What the hell would other governments be doing wanting to attack? No one has any resource” The Colonel replied again with a dismissive tone to his voice.

“That’s the whole point, resource. You’re on the ground Colonel, and you’ll have to forgive me, but you’re not made privy to the sorts of information I am. Globally the human-race is in turmoil, those nations that did get defences up quickly enough to save sizable portions of the population are running out of resources, and fast. We’re on the

brink here, we needed to protect our selves, it's every country for itself now, it has been since the world started to fall apart. God damn it Michaels! We need to work together on this! Saving the lives of the people up there means as much to me as it does to you! Let's just get on with this!" Little Wiseman shouted at the Colonel, standing and pointing his small stubby index finger at him, shaking it relentlessly.

There was a moment of silence, Push saw a bead of sweat run down the side of Wisemans face and the Colonel growled, "You expect me to believe you've not been building your own in secret to try and over throw the government and us, Wiseman you piece of shit!"

"Michaels, we don't have any choice! We are on the brink here! swallow your pride, god damnit!" Push interjected again, growing increasingly frustrated with the unwinnable argument.

"Shit, once we're out the other side of this, Wiseman, there's going to be some serious changes around here." The colonel relented. "You've got my word as a man of honour that I'll do everything I can to persuade the Generals to abandon their efforts with the coup and form an alliance with the GIA in order to collaborate with the Tokyo Collider effort and get us the fuck out of this mess." The Colonel leant in, reaching his hand out to shake that of Wisemans. They clasped hands and the Colonel pulled Wiseman in close, almost completely over his desk, his chewed up cigar stump almost burning Wiseman's face. "But if you fuck with me, my men or the protection of the remaining civilian population, I'll fucking kill you and that beast you've created, you got that Wiseman?" He said slowly and purposefully before letting him go.

Wiseman composed himself for a second, "We're on the same side here Colonel, you just remember that."

"He will," Push interrupted, motioning his hands at Michaels, as if to say calm down.

“How do we go about trying to contact General Ironhans, Wiseman?” he asked.

“Hoods-up gentlemen, we need to go through to the direct-comms room. It’s the only room with a hardwire comms-link with central military command, for use in times exactly like this one. Mist!” He exclaimed at the end of his sentence as they all lifted their hoods back over their heads and the Mist filtered back into the room.

They exited, following Wiseman down a series of corridors, the Colonel still concerned about his men on the surface.

“Wiseman, I my men need refuge down here whilst we get our shit together, if I’m going to trust you, you need to trust me, let me bring them down here, start getting kitted out, whatever way this thing works out we need to resupply? Have you got enough space for another Battalion?”

“Arh Michaels, this is the GIA HQ, it used to be an old nuclear bunker, there’s enough room for ten thousand people down here,” Wiseman replied, adding emphasis to the number. “We’re barely at half capacity, get your men down here. Mist Commander,” He turned away from the Colonel. “Wiseman here, re-activate the entrance lifts, the Colonels men are on their way, have provisions at the ready, whatever they need, they’ve got.”

“Outstanding,” the Colonel replied as they continued to walk, the Dirty-Dogs having attached themselves back with him and Push, marching behind them.

“What the hell happened in there Colonel? The men are coming down that easy? Did they surrender? What do you mean we have to trust each other?” Ruffshot said through a comms-stream only open to Michaels and the rest of their team.

“Just remind yourself who you’re talking to Corporal.” The Colonel replied with an authoritative tone before quickly continuing “A major shit storm that’s what happened, just stick by my side. Men, stay alert, we’re not in the clear yet, you’re going to see some serious, highly classified shit within the next few minutes, keep it together and trust my

judgement. If any of you have any problem with either mine or Push's judgment, you need to run back up to the surface right now, because if any of you try turning on me when we enter this room, by god I'll put you down myself."

The comms channel remained silent for a second, the men not entirely sure what to think as they came to the direct-comms room door.

"Sir, we're the Dirty-Dogs sir, we fight for the North American Ghost Marine Corps, we're your men Sir, that's all that needs to be said." Ruffshot replied.

"Good, well, like I said, just fucking stay alert." The doors slid open showing a large white circle on the floor in the middle of the circular room. It glowed and extended a shaft of light upwards, partially illuminating, partially reflecting off the curved metallic walls.

"Colonel, if you use your security clearance with this hard-line comms link you'll be connected directly with a hologram projection of General Ironhans." Wiseman said, as they filtered in, lining the rounded walls. The colonel stepped up to a smaller white circle that had begun glowing on the periphery of the larger one in the middle of the room.

"Colonel Mann Michaels, requesting direct-comms link with General Ironhans. Goggle ident 64-32-90-B-H, security clearance level Alpha-Niner." The Colonel spoke, a wide, green shaft of laser light came down over him like a tube, from head to toe. The computer spoke. "Direct-comms link accepted. Projection in 3-2-1."

General Ironhans appeared in the large inner circle, standing bolt upright, hand's behind his back. The square jawed old man had a crew cut and an old shrapnel wound that gave him a permanent lift in the right side of his upper lip, making him forever look as if he were snarling.

"Good to see you Michaels, I trust you've taken out that bastard Wiseman and have requisitioned the GIA HQ? That's at least what our analysts predicted you would have done. I need to debrief you on what the hell is going on here, it's a mess but we're getting

everything under control now, how many men have you got? How many Mist-Gendarmerie did you manage to capture. I bet they didn't put up much of a fight. Come on speak up Michaels! God damn it people are dying!" The general finally ended

"General, I've not captured the base, I've been in negotiations with Wiseman. We've come into some highly volatile information. You need to look at this General, I know you wouldn't accept any communications from the GIA directly, but this is absolutely vital to our effort. It's a game changer General. Let me stream over a live feed, you need to see this." Michaels replied with a respectful and careful tone.

The General said nothing for a second, before the hologram showed him lift his hand and rub his chin carefully. "Well, Colonel, show me what you've got." He finally replied. Michaels wasting no time started streaming the feed from the Tokyo Collider laboratory.

"This General, is the Tokyo Collider, and it's our last best hope of securing our nation against Vampiric threat and potentially eradicating the Ghost threat in the near future."

"Jesus wept, what is that creature, Colonel? What the hell have the GIA been up to? We left them unchecked for too long, obviously they're not the pencil pushing fools we thought they were." The General replied, letting his guard down for a second, a quiver of fright entering his voice.

"You're right General, but we've started to formulate a Plan already. I'm feeding you over all the details now. I need you to consent to an allied force between NAGMC and the GIA and cease all plans to continue the military coup effective immediately. Speaking frankly sir, there's a lot of shit we need to get sorted out. It's patently clear the government has fallen now, we're in charge topside, but you know as well as I do that the NAGMC doesn't have the resource to fight Ghosts and Vampires whilst resorting power and Mist to

the cities. And we don't have any mandate. We need to join forces to destroy this new Vampiric threat, we need what the GIA have got here. They're willing to cooperate with our demands, we need to get through this and save our people, we have no other choice General. The very survival of us as a race depends on it." Michaels spoke, strong with words; he knew how much relied on the answer from the General. The hologram before him reading through the information on the Tokyo Collider, rubbing his face and absorbing. He could tell the General had been and was coming to grips with the enormity of the situation.

"For Christ sake General!" Push jumped in. "People are dying, what the hell do you even have to think about? If you're thinking strategically, just think about this, within a week there won't be anyone left to protect! This is them or us General!" He finished as Michaels turned to restrain him.

"Who the hell is this Michaels!?" The general blurted.

"This is Push Burrows, chief science officer at the Mist Production Agency HQ in New York, and one of the original scientists on the SACSAMP, he's here advising me with science related matters." Replied the Colonel, trying to mask his frustration.

"Right, well, Michaels, looks like we've got ourselves into a serious mess here. This footage I've got is impressive, god damn it Michaels, what a mess we're all in, fucking Ghosts and Vampires, what the hell else were we supposed to do? And now our numbers are running lower by the hour, what a mess, what a mess." The hologram figure moved and sat down on a large leather desk chair. The General rubbed the palm of his hand down his face and cleared his throat, the image waving and distorting. "Listen, your man is right, if we're going to come out the other side of this one we're going to have to cooperate, it's the way our planning was beginning to lead us anyway. If the GIA are willing to make concessions we can work with that. Colonel, I will advise the other Generals of our

situation, get the GIA's best people on a comms-stream immediately, we need to figure this out before it's too late. Consider a general stand down of our men in terms of the coup. We will continue fighting the Ghost and Vampiric threat, get the Mist-Gendarmerie to back up our numbers immediately, I'll send further orders through immanently. We're warriors you and I Colonel, we're going to win this thing, humanity will prevail." The hologram faded and the room went silent.

"Let's get the fuck to it then!?" Push shouted with exhaustion and excitement in equal levels, pushing off the Colonel's grip.

"We've acquired a break here gentlemen, not usual in the field of war. We can do this, we've got what we wanted Wiseman. The orders are coming through already, we're going to have to use this direct line point to relay to the cities and coordinate as best we can. I'll equip my men and we'll head back to our home city of New York, they're severely handicapped numbers-wise as we were out of the City during the first mutations. We need to join the Tokyo Collider battalion there and take back our city."

Wiseman stepped forward, away from the position he had taken against the wall. "Excellent job Colonel, let's go get our country back."

Chapter 5 – It is all red

“Try not to think too much, okay?” Michaels said to Push as they walked down a corridor in the GIA HQ towards the soldier quarters area. “Look, just take a couple of these, they’ll knock you right out, give you about three hours sleep. We need you to be straight down the line out there, this sciencey stuff isn’t the same as shooting guns. We’ll be relying on you out there to be feeding us with information.”

“I know, I know, I just feel like I should be helping out in some way or something, getting ready for the fight.” Push replied, taking the pills the Colonel had pulled out of the forearm compartment on his sweat-suit.

“We’ve got 4 hours prep time, there’s literally nothing that can be done in that time other than fretting and prepping, and that’s my job, Push. Get some rest, you can’t deal with the amphetamine supplements like us soldiers can, we’re trained for it, you’re not.” He patted him on the back and sent him into the private room with a bunk bed, small sink and toilet before turning and walking back to his men, back to doing what he does best. Push watched his lined figure through the display of his Goggles, marching through the Mist before turning into the room.

“Secure,” he said, making sure the room was locked, “alarm, 3 hours, set,” to his Goggles, they responded with a small beep and flashed the time when he was due to rise.

“Jesus, 27 hours ago I was leaving Elizabeth and Lilly, now I’m here, and they may well be dead, fucking Jesus, how am I going to get them back.” He sat at his bed, rested his hooded head in his gloved hands. He wasn’t sure how much more of this he could take, the world falling apart and everything he’d done to try and protect his little bit of it coming undone. Having to know that, in the end, his little family unit, his beautiful wife, is adorable daughter, and the baby on the way could all be lost. What if he couldn’t save them like he

had promised?

All he had ever worked for was to try and make sure they were safe, that they had a chance at life, and now it's all coming apart again. He's got to start again, he's got to think, he's got to keep it together in the face of a new enemy, one as horrific as the last one, and try to come out the other side. Not so he can be happy, but so the ones he cares about most can find some sort of happiness in this world, so they can smile again, if he had that, he had everything. Nothing mattered in this space of horror and disaster and trauma and pain and suffering, as long as they could smile. Smile again, even if it were in this pocket of isolation, of the clouding Mist that he helped create, their prison, their safety, the horror of it all, just their smile was enough, he thought.

Elizabeth had shown him a true reason to live, after his awkward childhood and disastrous teen years. His parents splitting when he was young, using him as a bargaining chip against each other, he sat in the middle and hated both of them. His brilliant mind allowing him to escape in science, particularly the fields of biology and pharmaceuticals, surpassing his peers at a young age, all he had was his science.

The college years were better, but not by much, his ability to synthesise practically any drug known to man, and even some new ones, made him a popular guy on campus, but it didn't bring him friends. His nights ended alone or with one night stands, instant drug fuelled popularity with no back bone. And then she appeared, her modest beauty, her passion for life and friends and people, she came to have passion for him, and she made his world, and then they made a little one together.

He lay back on the bed, "Goggles, sleep mode," he said. The display dimmed to almost black, his eyes open he could barely see anything, the minute speakers in his ears went silent. Lay on the little bunk bed, in his Tactical Ghost Protection Suit, he could only hear his own breathing now, totally isolated. Enclosed in the small room, surrounded by

The Mist, buried by hundreds of feet of concrete and installation, topped with soil and earth before the open atmosphere, where the threats currently fought. Humans hiding, the Vampiric Threat roaming, slowly dying, needing blood, eating, completely savage, and the Ghost Threat, swooping and scooping out the electrical bio energy where and when they could get in between the pockets of dissipating Mist.

He shuddered and closed his eyes, going back to a kinder time, a nicer place, a simpler period, one not fraught with horror and the constant need for precaution and the ever present thought of survival.

“I’ve missed you Push, I’m so glad you’re back,” he could hear her as he entered his small house from a business trip, her long red hair flowing over her shoulders and down her front, just touching the bump of their first unborn child. The sun poured through the window, lighting up the kitchen which was full of the smells of summer. The little planters hanging outside the windows, full with Rosemary and Thyme she had seeded and kept, burst with their spiced smell that wafted into the kitchen.

She had laid out thick crusty bread and potent cheeses and oils for them to sit and talk and dip and spread and eat and fall into each others eyes until it went dark. She would ask about what she had heard on the news and what was happening to people and he would reassure her and say;

“Don’t worry beautiful, we’re working on a solution, everything will be fine, we’ve got some of the most amazing minds on the planet sorting this thing out.” And she would believe him as he sat back and stared, watching the sun glint behind her and watching her smile overpower its rays as they flooded into the room.

She would flicker her beautiful blue eyes and he would take her hand and help her softly rise to her feet. They would move up into their scented bathroom and light candles and he would bathe her gently, scrubbing her hair and rubbing his hand carefully over her

belly and feel the little kicks. He would wrap her in soft linen and they would fall asleep in each others arms.

“What about the baby, will it be affected? What if it causes, problems, you know, with the birth?” She would ask as he told her of the plans, of what he had come to invent and what humanity had to do. Turning their backs on those who could no longer be helped and protecting themselves.

“Calm down Elizabeth, we’ll be fine, it’s just a temporary solution, the new guys, the GIA, they’re working on a permanent end to this madness, everything will be fine.” He reassured her as they moved into their new apartment, fully equipped Anti-Ghost Threat preservation unit. Being a scientist on SACSAMP he got placed first. They settled into their new routine and things didn’t seem too bad, and then their first was born and he was the happiest man alive.

Cradling their baby, Lilly, in the secure hospital, in a bubble free of Mist, next to his sleeping wife. He smiled at her and truly found the reason for what he was doing.

“I’m going to do everything I can to protect you Lilly, you’re my world. Look how perfect you are,” he said as the tiny baby fingers grabbed onto his index finger, barely making it all the way around. He smiled at the little tuft of infinitely fine blonde hair and a tear dropped from his cheek.

“This Mist, it won’t last much longer, and you and your mummy, we’ll have a perfect life, free of the crazy things that are happening at the moment. I love you so much Lilly, I’m never going to let anything happen to you.”

The patter of her little feet around the small apartment, her silk like hair seemed to grow by the day, they had everything they needed but nothing they wanted. A child that had never seen direct sunlight, yet was the light of his life, a perfect little being, the reason he kept going, both of his women. They both wanted more, but she could do little, so he

worked tirelessly, researching and running the Mist-Production. Entering into his apartment at night, lusting after the same sensations as before, but it just wasn't the same. The familiar sickly smell remained everywhere, the light screens behind fake windows, only illuminated their beauty more, and highlighted the bleak reality in which they had to settle. Tastes were always masked by the Mist, everything became bland and grey. They survived, they no longer lived.

At a point when life should be at its beautiful tender peak and his mind should be flooded with happiness, he could not be happy, he could not rest. "...burrows..."

"Burrows..."

"Burrows!"

"BURROWS!!"

He bolted upright as his Goggles and sweat-suit came back to life, light flooding in through it's display, he instinctively raised his forearm above his eyes but realised that would do little help as the fog of sleep quickly washed away.

"What the hell?!" Push shouted, coughing and raising to his feet, his sweat-suit full active now, blinking rapidly trying to wash the film of tiredness from his eyes.

"Push, sorry for the rude awakening, we're ahead of schedule, get your shit together we're moving out in 30 minutes." Michaels said to him as he stepped back outside of the room, and leant against the wall. Push moved quickly, checking himself and following Michaels outside, they both started down the corridor.

"How the hell did you get in?" He asked Michaels, still a little groggy.

"Push, I'm a Colonel, I'm a veteran of numerous wars, battles, skirmishes, all fought with projectile weapons. I was the only one to survive out of five platoons that I was assigned to during the first Ghost Wars, I think I know how to bypass a door lock."

"Okay, I get the picture, where are we at?" Push replied, awake, alert now.

“Jesus, Push, you should see what we’ve got here. Wiseman might be a slimy, grease ball little fuck that I wouldn’t trust taking care of a rabid pit-bull, but he’s put something together here. We might just have a fighting chance, especially if what he says is true.” Michaels replied with an air of excitement.

“You really think, that’s good news. Are your men ready, how did they react to it all?” Push asked.

“Oh, they’re ready Push, they’re as ready as they’ve ever been, a chance at projectile based combat again, they’re pumped to the hilt. But fuck that for a minute Push, listen,” Michaels stepped out in front of them, turned and placed his hands on Push’s shoulders. He could feel the Colonel staring, even though he couldn’t actually see his bright green eyes, he could sense them through the layers of technology and Mist.

“I’ve spoken to it, Push.” He said slowly.

“What do you mean spoken to it? Spoken to what?” Push replied not catching on.

“Tokyo Collider, I’ve spoken to it, the beast, it’s, well, it’s alive, and it can talk, and it moves and it’s a fully fucking equipped killing machine, and the weird thing Push, it’s not the terrible monster I thought it was going to be.” He turned and they started walking again. “I mean, I thought, shit, this thing, what the fuck is it? I’m going to have to put it down straight away? I thought, you know, I’ll hear Wiseman out, but I’m basically going to have to take 100 men with high explosives and turn it into a very expensive mush.” He knocked himself lightly on the head with a clenched fist. “But, it seems to work, it takes orders and well, we the super soldiers that follow it seem to obey. We’re back up on top, in the Bubble-Ship, ready to get going.”

They turned the final corridor and entered into the lift. Both men’s knees buckled slightly as it took off, shooting towards the surface, the ship, the two battalions, and the Tokyo Collider.

“Men!” The Colonel shouted as they left the lift, walked through the small pocket of Mist into the protective bubble of the ship and up the familiar loading bay ramp. The dirty-dogs stood to attention, having stood guard at the loading bay ramp, readied for remnants of their rabid enemy to come running up, seeking their blood. The Colonel and Push walked passed them and continued into the loading bay, Corporal Ruffshot saluting the Colonel and giving a small nod of respect to Push. They went back to their sentry stance instantly.

“They seem wired, Michaels?” Push said to the Colonel, again, as before, trying not to get taken out by all the ensuing preparations taking place around the loading bay.

“Shit, Push, they’re running on minimal sleep, maximum adrenaline and vast quantities of amphetamine supplements. They’re about to go to war against Ghosts and Vampires and they’re allied with a battalion of genetically altered super soldiers with no combat experience and a purpose bred 30ft tall killing machine. No one knows what the fuck is going to happen or if we’ll get out of this thing in one piece or many. God damn it, I need a cigar.” The Colonel replied as they walked out of the loading bay and into the maze of corridors. “We’ve got it stored in the main medical bay, the loading area is too full with equipment at the moment, and the ceilings are too low everywhere else. The operating theatre has a high ceiling for the viewing room, so it can stand up in there. It’s in there now in fact, getting prepped. I want you to talk to it before it goes into battle, I know you’re no psychologist, but you’re the one person I trust the most on this ship and if you have any last second doubts about it, I need to know. It’s not stupid, it thinks, it may have tricked us already. Anyway, you’re not leaving the ship, we need you to be on here directing us on the ground, it’s going to be a shitfest the likes of which we’ve never seen in our lives, all out war, we can’t afford to lose you, Push.”

“I’m no tactician Michael’s that’s not my field, what the hell do I know about guiding

soldiers into battle, especially super soldiers and monsters against other monsters? What the hell good am I up here, and what the hell about my family!?” Push retorted as they reached the doors of the medical bay. Michaels could sense the anger in his voice.

“Look, Push, you know I wouldn’t screw you, I’ve got the Dirty Dogs assigned to your family, I’m giving up an entire Ghost-team for you, their mission is to grab and extract back to the ship. Once all the men are on the ground, they’re getting dropped by your apartment specifically.” Michaels replied reassuringly. “You’re the brightest guy I’ve ever met, if there’s one person who can feed our sweat-suits with the information we need to get through this on the ground, it’s you. I’ve got the tactics covered, I need you in command of the bubble-ship probes, they’ll be shooting all over New York City, I need you to be my eyes. You got me? Now brace yourself. Remember, this thing’s smart.” They turned and the medical bay doors opened.

“Jesus! Thank Christ for that!” The Colonel exclaimed, pulling the hood of his sweat suit back as they entered the Mist free medical bay. He jammed a cigar into the side of his mouth and pulled a lit match to his face simultaneously, puffing hard to get it going. “Push, meet Tokyo Collider!” he walked up to it and gave it a light tap on the knee, which was at the height of the Colonels 6ft 2” frame.

It stood in the middle of the room in pre-prep tactical warfare gear. Only its head visible, the rest of its body was covered in light-armor not dissimilar from their sweat-suits, wrapped tightly its body definition was incredible. Its bare head illuminated from the base up by a cone like collar that rose up slightly around its jaw line from the collar of its sweat suit. It didn’t seem to be wearing Goggles, which made Push curious. It stepped over, its powerful feet hitting the floor with surprising grace.

“Well, Tokyo Collider Alpha 001 to be exact, I’m the first of my kind, my brothers are being activated as we speak, being prepped for war, as I am. Hello Push Burrows, I am

glad we have had chance to meet before I enter the field of battle.” It spoke, in a deep animalistic voice, whilst maintaining a calm air of intelligence.

Push stood for a second, silenced and in awe, before pulling his hood off and looking up, trying to soak in the magnificence of its size. It’s raw, visible power.

“Hello Tokyo Collider, I’m also glad we have had chance to meet too. Are...Are you ready for the battle?” Push replied, his voice sounding high pitched and winey in comparison.

“Push, TC was born ready, or grown ready, whatever.” The Colonel interjected before the beast could reply. “It’s your god damned job to kill the enemy, and die if necessary defending this great nation against what we have come to know as the Ghost and Vampric threat, like any other soldier, you know that don’t you, TC.”

“Absolutely Colonel.” It replied, almost standing to attention but not quite managing to stand fully upright in the medical bay. The Colonel tilted his head, listening to the tiny speaker inside the hood of his sweat-suit, flicked the remainder of his cigar away and gave TC a light punch on the back of its gigantic and pulsating calf muscle.

“We’re nearing New York, gentlemen, lets get this show on the road, Mist-Shell release has begun. Push, follow me if you will. Medical team, make Tokyo Collider combat ready. TC, I’ll see you on the field, I cannot wait to see what you’re capable of.” He turned and left, Push following, both raising their hoods, going back into the Mist of the ships corridors. The medical team and scientists from the GIA wheeled out a gigantic Vulcan cannon and began attaching it to the right arm of TC.

“Well, what do you think?” Michaels quizzed as they walked.

“Seriously? I spoke like five words to it, what the hell do you expect from me?” Push replied, as they came to a halt at an internal ship lift.

“I guess you’re right, we’ve not got the pleasure of checks at this moment Push, just

be sure to keep track of it, I want to know everything it does, if it fucking sneezes, I want to know.” The Colonel replied, jamming his finger into the lift button repeatedly until finally the door opened.

“Push, you’re going to the command bay from here, I’m heading to my men in the loading bay, we’ll have a direct comms-stream at all times. Hook yourself in, acquire a stream with Corporal Ruffshot, those are your men, they’ve been assigned 2 super soldier units as well. Wiseman will be in the Command centre with you monitoring the progress of the Tokyo Collider alongside you. I need constant updates from the probes that are around the city as well Push. Lets do this.” Michaels lifted his arm and they shook hands.

“I’m not going to let you down Michaels, you just take care of yourself out there.” Push replied, firmly shaking hands and stepping into the lift.

“Ha! You know me Push, it’s not my time yet.” He turned and walked toward the loading bay as the lift closed behind him. He hated this, the calm before the storm, but there was a job to be done, and he was just the man to do it.

Entering through a higher level into the huge bay, he walked along a platform high up, grabbed onto a rail and looked down at the mass of men. The area had been ordered and set in place, missiles prepped, fuel pumped, munitions loaded, everything else stowed away, just a swarming, heaving mass of pure brute. The 1000 strong 105th TGR Unit, 1000 strong 1st SS Unit and Tokyo Collider at the end of the loading bay by the ramp, rising above. All the floating eyes through his Goggle display, the green lines drawing out his surroundings through the Mist. His heart skipped a beat, he could feel the ship descending and his ears gave a small pop. He spoke to Push through his direct comms-stream.

“Push are you there? I want you to talk to the men, give them a quick update,

nothing but stats, don't worry, I'll prep their moral. Let us know what we need to know, stream to our Goggles now. I'm patching you through to everyone." The Colonel said, looking down at his men, gritting his teeth.

"Shit, okay, I'm ready" Push replied.

"Men!" He shouted at the hall, his voice instantly streaming through the in-ear microphones of the Tactical Ghost Prevention Suit's. They all turned and stamped to attention, lined and squared. Their eyes lined in unison.

"Push Burrows, our lead scientist will give you an update. Push, let us know what we need to know." He spoke loudly, still staring down at the men below.

"Thank you, Colonel. I've pulled the data from the probes we sent out ahead of us around the city. Here's what we know; Comms streams are still down with the Mist-Production headquarters, Mist-Production on Manhattan Island is currently at 2%, only a few mist lungs are operational. This means there are collected swarms of Vampiric threat, possibly numbering in their thousands, around these locations. Now, we have pummelled the Island with everything, all the Mist-Shells we could carry, you'll have 3 hours of Mist, given the wind stays calm, to sweep the Island of the Vampiric Threat and rescue any Civilians that are still alive. Numbers seen negligible, however, the majority of Manhattan has been upgraded to Anti-Ghost Threat Preservation Apartment Units, people could survive in these over the last 48 hours quite comfortably. So, your missions are two fold; Kill everything that isn't human, rescue everything that is. It's that simple. The enemy will be rampant and numerous, Ghosts will follow shortly if you don't do your job in time." Push finished.

"Outstanding!" The Colonel exclaimed in response. He stood up straight and started pacing the platform he was on, high above the battle ready men below, chest puffed out.

"Did you get that men?!" he asked, turning to face them.

“Sir, yes, sir!” they responded in unison, Tokyo Collider’s deep voice masked by the 2000 strong response.

“Now listen to me and listen good. We’re going to hit this god forsaken earth with everything we have. The government has collapsed, Ghosts and Vampires are roaming free killing the innocent, humanity is on the brink of collapse. Men, we’ll reign hell down on this swine and we’ll take back our city. Your brothers in arms will do the same across our glorious nation and we will survive. Humanity will emerge from the dark on this day, and then we will see what horror we’ve faced and how we have over come and then, we will really get to work. This is a question of our very survival, men. We’ll see the sun again soon, and it won’t mean something has gone wrong, the sun won’t be a feared sight, it will shine down on us as we will have eradicated the Ghost Threat. But this is our first hurdle men. This time will be forever remembered as the day we rose up and tore at the flesh of the soulless and vaporised the shadow of the bodiless, and took back our land, ready to bathe again in the light of our central star. Are you ready men!”

“Sir, Yes, Sir!” They responded in unison as the Bubble-Ship started down at the tip of Manhattan Island. Tokyo Collider stepped forward, to the edge of the loading bay, breathing heavily, the huge Vulcan cannon on its right arm began to spin, readying for attack. Loading with its belt fed 20mm rounds that would be released at a rate of 6000 per minute, it could tare through anything in its way. Converted from an old F16 fighter jet, from before the Mist fell, only a beast of TC’s size and strength could handle its formidable weight and kickback. And now Tokyo Collider stood ready, upright, growling with deadly intent, fully suited with heavy armour, its blood pumped with a mix of amphetamine supplements, carrying 100,000 rounds.

It could run and fire continuously for 16 minutes with lethal accuracy provided by its Goggles targeting and locking systems, the ability to fell 2 city blocks in 15 minutes

between its giant arms of death. One with the Vulcan cannon, the other gloved with its Power-Fist armour, tripling the pressure it could exert, providing it with 100,000lbs per square inch of crushing might. A true organism for war and exactly what they needed for their imminent battle.

The first platoon of Mist Marines and Super Soldiers filed in rank behind him, all ready, all prepped to run into the fray. Armed to the teeth, the battle hardened marines eyed the wet behind the ear super soldiers with uneasy contempt.

“What the hell are we doing with these things?”

“What if they fucking turn on us or some shit?”

“If one so much as farts badly I’m fucking it up!” Whispers of fear and trepidation flowed through private comms-streams, shooting invisibly between the sweat-suits of the marines.

But they’re ready, their blood is up, at boiling point. Some with projectile weapons, everything from automatic machine-guns to shotguns and desert eagle side arms, ready to kill the enemy the old fashioned way. Some with Mist-Canister launchers and Mist-Throwers for back up, in case the shroud they had fired at the ground from their ship lifts. The super-soldiers without fear, their strength equalled that of the Vampiric threat, their intelligence that of a science officer, not a regular grunt. But both sets relying on each other to get them through this fucked up battle of monsters and fear. To hit the ground running as a single platoon, work together to eradicate the enemy and emerge with war torn hands, brothers in arms. Each platoon, all 20 of them, dropped up the length of Manhattan Island to the end of the city borders at Upper Harlem, where the Mist-Cloud protection ran out and the Mist-free badlands lay. They would fight, they would win.

“TC, you know what to do, you’re being dropped at the Ground Zero Mist-Lung facility and Mist Production Head Quarters, you need to take that building, it’s imperative to

our effort that we get back in there, it's going to be our central point of command. There's a platoon being dropped every 15 blocks up to the city limit at Trinity Park and five to backup, whoever needs it. They'll be dropped immediately after we discover the major pockets of Vampiric Threat. The Ground Zero Mist-Lung has been partially active over the last 48 hours, we're expecting a lot of resistance in this area, I'm streaming you the latest data coming in from the probe now. God Speed." Push said through his comms-stream to Tokyo-Collider.

"Affirmative." It replied.

The ship touched down and the loading bay ramp slowly lowered to the ground, presenting the thick Mist of their protective bubble immediately before them. The entire loading bay fell completely silent, the air was ripe with anger and fear at the same time.

They stood for a split second with curious intent. The Mist was still, a moment of absolute peace before a deep howling sound sucked at the fear in the Ship. The Vulcan cannon on Tokyo Colliders arm reached maximum revolutions and screamed with ferocity eager to fire, the beast's giant jaw clenched and its power glove pulled its fist taught. Their peace was broken with the next moment, the clambering sound of a quadruped rushing on the loading bay ramp, slapping bare limbs against the grated metal. Just as quickly it disappeared, a flicker of curiosity pulsed through all those watching, and then they knew.

It flew up the ramp, howling and screaming, hands stretched out forward, mouth wide with bloody fangs, wailing, nails and teeth ready to penetrate. Tokyo Collider raised its power fisted left hand and caught the Vampire as it flew through the air directly at it. It brought its catch close to its eyes with a morbid curiosity.

"You're my first," it growled before clenching, the Vampire bawled violently for a terrible moment before exploding in a puff of blood and flesh.

TC flung the remnants of the torso in his grip to the ground and let out a ferocious

roar, the powerful sonic wave reverberating through the loading bay and the men cheered at their victory. Raising their guns high in the air, shouting in respect for their beast like comrade. Their war cry slowly faded and the sound of skin on metal came again, this time resonating with the sound of a pack, a herd of galloping horror.

“Charge!” Tokyo Collider shouted, raising its fist high in the air whilst running down the loading bay ramp, immediately followed by its platoon of men.

They hit the ground running, Tokyo Collider releasing a quick burst of its gigantic arm cannon and watching the exploding puffs of flesh follow through the air where a Vampiric body used to be. The men following, crouching and laying down suppressing cover fire, their lighter weaponry, whilst less dramatic, just as effective held back the wave after wave of vampires emerging from the Mist. The sheer numbers that had managed to survive now becoming apparent, in their thousands they had taken refuge in the last dissipating clouds of Mist around the base of the Lung at Ground Zero and the main Mist Lung Production HQ. Desperate for blood they scrambled like rapid animals, launching themselves at the men in their hundreds, howling, screaming, clawing, biting, and quickly they fell.

The Bubble-ship behind them raised the loading bay ramp and lifted off, ready to hit its next target 15 blocks into the Island. The next platoon stepping forward, expectantly to the edge of the bay ramp, ready to attack, ready to get their own piece of the horrible swine that had come from nowhere, and ravaged from the inside out. They are ready to take back their city.

“Holy mother of God, Colonel, you have to see this. Patching through Tokyo Collider Goggle stream now.” Push said, sat in the command chamber, working constantly to absorb the battle ground information that was progressively flowing in from more and more Platoons as they hit the ground.

“I told you he was ready,” Wiseman spoke up from the command centre as they watched. The Colonel momentarily distracted from trying to implement the insertion of his troops onto the Island.

They were greeted with a stream of Tokyo Colliders powerful 20mm rounds flying through the air, glowing white with heat, tearing through the weak flesh, one of the massive rounds could shoot through half a dozen bodies before fully depleted of its massive amounts of kinetic energy. The Vampiric threat’s blood rained down from the sky.

A momentary pause as the Threat discontinued its advance, they noticed how the air, thick with Mist had begun to retain the blood particles of the exploded Vampires, turning it a velvet red. The silence only disturbed by chunks of flesh slapping against the ground, splashing the puddles of blood accumulated from kills just seconds before. And another wave, preceded only by the sound of their terrible screams, pouring in from the sky and exploding on impact with the wall of reactionary bullets.

The horror continuing to attack with unrelenting craziness, jumping, pouncing from all angles, emerging out of the Mist with unflinching blood lust and Tokyo Collider stood strong in the middle. Surrounded by a circle formation of its fellow troops, spinning, it targeted Vampire after Vampire, watching them popping in the air like weak sacks of blood and sinew. It grabbed the few strays that made it through the wall of gun fire out of the air and crushed them, throwing their bodies back from whence they came.

The streaming images and sounds running through to Push, the Colonel and Wiseman, the display of Tokyo’s Goggles, it’s ammunition counter rolling down from it’s 100,000 round start as the vampires kept coming. Grunting, panting, its huge bulk steadied against the force of the spinning cannon.

“DIE, DIE, DIE!” It was shouted as they kept coming, the bodies and torn flesh mounting around them, forming a terrifying barrier of mutated pain and death.

“Is...is it enjoying this?” Push said hesitantly to the other men on the comms-stream.

“Don’t be preposterous,” Wiseman retorted, fear audible in his voice, “It’s fending for its life, like any other rational being fighting for its life, its high on adrenaline and amphetamines!”

“Look, it’s heart rate is through the roof, it’s running out of ammunition already, that’s just passed 8 minutes of continuous fire and they’re still coming!” Push jumped in.

“I’ve seen enough, I’m getting the rest of my men on the ground, it’s killing the enemy, that’s all I’m concerned with at this moment. Push, the Dirty Dogs are at your command in t-minus 4 minutes, their drop will be Grand Central Terminal, two blocks from your apartment, the pilot say’s that’s the closest he can get you. Keep me up to date, I’ll be with the penultimate drop. You’re doing a good job, Push, we might just make it out the other side of this fucking mess, get the power and the Mist restored, maybe.” Michaels signed off, running back across the loading bay barking orders as his comms-stream crackled out.

Push went back to the probes, relaying information to him from across the city, dipping in and out of soldiers feeds as the final platoons hit the ground and joined in with the fight. The pivotal Mist-Lung and Mist Production headquarters at ground zero remained the highest concentrated force of Vampires, the other three Mist-Lungs that had remained partially operable dotted across the city had hundreds rather than thousands of the enemy which were being pulverised by soldiers and marines already. Everything in between was relatively quiet, herm-seal chambers that had trapped pockets of Mist would house half a dozen easily killed Vampires, but as the Mist had dissipated across those parts where the Lungs had been taken-offline completely, there were just UV burnt bodies piled high of those who had mutated.

“How are we looking Push?” Corporal Ruffshot interjected in his gravely but up-beat

tone, shifting Push's attention from analysis and relay of tactical information.

"Good, Marine, we're looking good, we're at full insertion, but I guess you know that by the empty loading bay. Platoons across the city are sweeping successfully. It's a fucking Class A shitticane down at Ground Zero, but Tokyo Collider and his men are taking care of that..."

"...Sir, you said 'his' in relation to Tokyo Collider, shouldn't it be 'its'?" Ruffshot again broke Push's train of thought.

"Shit, Corporal I did, well, I guess once you've seen what I've seen it's doing, you'll understand why, it's really fighting for us out there. It's giving everything it's got for the preservation of our kind; it doesn't know what the hell is going on, Christ, it's only been sentient for the equivalent of a few weeks. It just keeps killing. Anyway," he brought his eyes back into focus on the display of his goggles. Pulling up and feeding him with all manner of battlefield information. "Corporal, we're looking at good numbers of civilian survivors, platoons across the city are overriding emergency lock downs on entire blocks of apartments and retrieving dozens of families."

"That's good news sir, we're eager to get on the ground to get your family back,"

"Well, Corpral, that's good to hear, but this is not going to be any cake walk, some families have been turning inside their sealed homes, mutating, tearing each other apart. They've been finding pockets of them. Sometimes, it's just one family member that's mutated and eaten the rest of them and then it couldn't figure out how to get outside. The situation is still grim Corporal; we're not through this one yet. Get ready, we're reaching Grand Central Terminal. I'm patching through some numbers now." He broke off for a second as he relayed the necessary information before his voice crackled back through.

"The landing area, prior to the shelling was, 60% Mist free, which means there was enough about for reasonable numbers of the Vampiric Threat to survive. You are definitely going to

encounter the enemy, but in manageable numbers, and probably very weak from partial UV burning and lack of blood.” Push finished, half distracted by the sights and sounds that were constantly being fed through to him. “...And Ruffshot, listen, you’re going to see a lot of death out there, worse than Seattle, and much worse than Boston. We’re talking about Manhattan falling to the Threat and almost complete destruction in 30 hours. Marines are going to be out there too.”

“Thanks for the concern Burrows, but we’re all vets here, we’ve seen things you couldn’t even imagine. We’ll do our job, make sure you do yours.” Ruffshot replied flatly.

“You got it Corporal, just...just get my family back.”

“We’ve not failed you yet have we, Burrows?” He asked and turned simultaneously “Men, saddle up. Touch down in exactly 2 minutes.” Ruffshot shouted at his men and the super soldier contingent. They all grabbed their weapons and made their way to the bay doors, loading final rounds, slamming in live cartridges of bullets, slapping the soles of their boots and injecting more amphetamines.

“Say, Corporal, what the fuck do we call these guys anyway, they’ve not said a god damned word since we were assigned them.” Kwalski openly voiced through his comms-stream to the Ghost-team and the four super soldiers that had been attached to their unit.

“We’re labelled 1294-Alpha, 1295-Alpha, 1296-Alpha and 1297-Alpha, Sir, I’m 1296-Alpha.” One of them spoke in a cold, authoritative, toneless voice.

“No shit, so you can speak, can you take orders just as good? Listen here, you’re called Ned, Fred, Ted and...William.” Kwalski replied, walking along the line of them and slapping them on their armoured shoulders as he moved along .

“Kwalski!” Ruffshot shouted, pulling him back and into line with the other marines, Private Davis and Specialist Foster. “For the purpose of this insertion you’ll be called four,

five, six and seven, you got that? Everyone got that?! Now ready yourselves!”

“Sir, yes, sir!” They replied loudly in unison as they all lined up, ready for inspection moments before heading into the fray.

“God damn I’m glad you’re wearing those masks,” Ruffshot walked along the line of men, “You bunch of ugly savages. A demon knocked over barrel of merciless genes whilst fucking a gorilla at some point in this history of ours, scooped it up, wrapped it in a fucking sweat-suit, and some how I end up stood in front of it. Well, hell?! Aren’t I the lucky one? Look, one purpose you hairy brutes.” He pointed at his marines, not really caring for the soldiers yet. “We exit here, we kill everything we don’t like the look of and we get Push’s family back. There’s a pregnant woman and three year old girl counting on us, and I’ll be damned if they’re going to get eaten by vampires or scooped up by ghosts on my watch. You got that?”

“Sir, yes, sir!” The men replied again.

“Excellent. Super soldiers, you will take front and rear covering fire, you lead the way and cover our tails on the ground. We’ve experienced these things before; they like to jump down on you, fuckers take off before you can properly see them and dive in, you’ve seen the video-streams, hell, like you saw when the ramp first opened. So, we’ll keep our eyes on the sky you make sure nothing is running toward us, and for Christ sake keep your eyes peeled for any other civilians that we might encounter. We have two city blocks to cover, on our own, then we extract the family and another 7 blocks with them whilst we move up and attach ourselves to another platoon. We’ll probably get the pleasure of serving with the 99ths, a group of hardened bastards if I ever did know any, before move to rendezvous in central park. By that time everything should be under control, Push can get back with his family, and we can get back to killin’ whatever’s left.”

“Brace yourselves men, touch down coming imminently.” Push spoke through to

them. Super soldiers four and five took the front, the dirty dogs stood behind them, guns readied, soldiers six and seven moved up, taking the rear flanking positions.

Their knees jerked slightly as the hull of this ship touched down and the ramp opened once more. They stood, their Goggles quickly mapped out everything they needed, green wires outlining their surroundings. The floor, the walls, pavements, all drawn out in 3D against the ever present grey background of the Mist. The corporal looked up and darted his eyes from side-to-side, always the same feeling, like being a kid again, being presented with a new level in some new computer game he'd just got. Only this time he didn't have any extra lives, and his guns weren't as good either.

"Move, move, move!" Corporal Ruffshot shouted, the soldiers immediately ahead of him took off at a good pace.

"Jesus, just be careful men, you're my last hope, get back my family."

"Don't worry Push, we know what we're doing, now get back to feeding those who need it their information, and let us get on with our job." Ruffshot replied, the sound of stamping feet in the background, surrounded by heavy panting.

"Incoming!" Kwalski shouted as their comms stream crackled out in a hail of bullet fire and Push's attention got diverted back to the field of battle that was taking place across the city.

"Steady men!" Push diverted his attention to Tokyo Collider who was running low on ammunition but the numbers of vampiric threat had began to slow, they were either getting scared or they were running out of stock. Either way, the primary Mist-Lung and strong hold of Vampiric Threat was soon to be back in their hands.

"Move up! Second Assault Team, lay suppressive cover fire! First Assault Team, on me! I'm going to clear a path and I need you to storm the building." Tokyo shouted at the men as the hordes climbed up and over the gigantic pile of bodies that had accumulated in

front of them. Now at least ten feet high, like a horrid hill of death, torn flesh, piecing bone, stringy guts all piled in an awful mess. It surrounded them, almost entirely burying them in a crater of disgusting mutated filth, and it was at least five feet thick. For 30 minutes they had stood, 100 strong unleashing a wall of bullets in every direction, and the vampires fell. The ones that got through instantly pulverised by Tokyo Collider's mighty power fist as it rained its last 20,000 rounds. Now it was time to take back what was there's, the lead tactical position that was the Islands primary Mist-Lung and the Mist Production head quarters.

"Move men!" It shouted as the giant beast charged forward toward the main entrance of the facility. Push watched through the display and could hear its gigantic mouth pulling in hundreds of gallons of air and raging out Mist. Only in small amounts in comparison to when it breathed pure oxygen, but the gulping intake was clear as it ran. Bouldering feet smashing down on the chunks of flesh and bone and bodies that lay around them, building up speed it smashed into the wall of bodies that had accumulated. Flying into the air the cadavers rained down, out of the Mist on to the second assault team stood sentry, joining the death that followed the bullets of their suppressive cover fire.

Push watched as Tokyo Collider forced it's way though, the faces of the mutated splattering up against its gigantic goggles as they continued to feed it information on everything that was happening around it. Bursting through the other side, the Vampiric Threat came shooting through the air. The First assault team quickly followed it through the alleyway it had created, running over the scattered bodies, aiming and firing at the sky. The Mist around them continuing to glow velvet red as the thin blood of the vampires puffed into the air, bodies exploding outwards, either pulverized by bullets or burst by the gripping first of Tokyo.

"Demons!" Tokyo shouted and let out a mighty roar, silencing the howls of the

Vampiric Threat again, thwarting their advance for a few seconds. It bolted forward again with its surprising speed, smashing the bodies that got in its path. It reached the entrance area to the Lung and Production HQ.

“Men, path clear, move up, get in and sweep! Now! Now! Now!” Its deep, penetrating voice commanded the men as its Vulcan cannon powered up. The high pitched scream of its spinning barrels filling the air, creating a mini horizontal hurricane cone as it sucked in the Mist before unleashing the 20mm rounds. Finally releasing, firing into the sky like a glowing white stream of hell. Pulverising what was left of the threat, hailing down on Tokyo and his men from all directions now. Frantically the men ran up, smashed their way through the large herm-seal entrance to the facility whilst shooting their way through the remnants, clambering over piled bodies, splashing through puddles of blood.

“Jesus, it’s working, it’s fucking working. Patch, comms-stream priority one connection Colonel Mann Michaels...Colonel, we’re about to take ground zero Mist-Lung and production HQ. Tokyo is doing it, he’s pushing through Colonel.” Push said, almost excitedly to the Colonel.

“Outstanding news Push. Minimal threat on the ground here, we’re taking care of these fuckers no problem, how about your family?” The Colonel replied as the familiar sound of gunshot fire and howling beasts followed his angry tone and quickly crackled out.

“I’m patching back through to Ruffshot momentarily. We’ve landed in Central Park now. Probes show Ghost Threat has reached 0% city wide, the Mist-Shells we dropped will give us another couple of hours at most, but if Tokyo Collier takes back the HQ and secures it, I’ll get straight over, we’ll have Mist production back up and running in no time.” Push said, his Goggle display popping up a small glowing red dot in its corner. “Colonel, I’m getting a comms-stream through. We’re almost there, Michaels, almost. Good luck.”

“Burrows! Burrows!” Ruffshot crackled through. “Fuck!” his voice still streamed

through, out but overpowered by the sound of gunfire and screams in the background.

“Don’t....Kwal...get and take them...the fuck...move, move, move!” He shouted, breathing heavily. Push patched himself through to Ruffshot’s goggle display and saw them. The two sets of floating eyes, shorter than everyone else around them, one set particularly short, behind a wall of men shifting in rough formation on the familiar street, being drawn out by their Goggles.

“Push! Can you hear me?! We’ve got them, they’re safe, we’re moving up Park Avenue to 55th street to sync with the 99TH Platoon and move to central park.” Ruffshot came through crystal clear this time. His rough voice washing over Push like the air of a fresh winter morning, refreshing him, reinvigorating him, curing him of all his ills, blasting his very being into the absolute reality of now. “We’ve lost two of the super soldiers, Burrows. Brave as hell those fuckers, Jesus I didn’t expect it. Kwalski, watch your six!” His shouts were followed again by bullet fire and the dead screaming howls of the Vampiric Threat. “We’re still taking on enemies, numbers currently minor. When we hit the ground, shit, god damn wall of death hit us in the face. Burrows, you there!?” he crackled out to the sounds of bullets.

“Yes, sorry, yeah corporal I’m here, thank you, Jesus, thank you so much for saving my family, you don’t know how much I owe you, whatever I can do for you, Jesus, just, I don’t know.” Push replied, lost for words, watching the team move forward, surrounding his family, occasionally turning to see the floating eyes of his wife and daughter. Maintaining a barrier of courage between them and the Vampiric Threat they moved forward, killing and stomping their way through the Mist and the Vampiric Threat.

“Fuck, Burrows, just make sure we get out of here alive, you can help us with that right?” Kwalski interjected, with a loud sarcastic tone in his voice.

“Absolutely Lieutenant. That I can do. Look, probe analysis and comms-streams indicate that the 99ths at 55th Street and Park as they’re supposed to be, they’re also completely in control of that area. Sweeps show almost nil Vampiric activity and 0% Ghost Threat. The shell-Mist is holding up well and winds are nominal. Work your way up slowly and you should be fine. Join the platoon and work your way up to central park. We’ve landed and have started our first resupply efforts with platoons close-by. Tokyo Collider is securing the Mist Production HQ and ground zero mist lung. Things are looking up Corporal.” Push replied with enthusiasm.

“Looking up might be a bit of an overstatement Burrows. I’ve got 2 downed men, 13 blocks to cover on minimal ammunition and your child and wife to worry about.” Ruffshot replied, still surrounded by the sound of bullets and screams.

“Understood, I’ve just re-directed 25 men from the 99ths, sync at 49th and Park. They can help you with ammunition and you can move up to Central Park.”

“Affirmative, and what the hell is with the Mist Burrows? It started turning red almost straight after we were dropped off by the Bubble-Ship and it’s getting worse all the time? Our Goggles work fine in it, but it’s weird as sam hell.” Ruffshot replied, panting.

“We’ve been seeing this city wide corporal. I’m not sure what it is at the moment, at ground zero were enemy casualties are in their thousands the Mist is like a god damn velvet sheet coming down over them.”

“Fucking figure it out Burrows, this shit is disgusting,” Kwalski randomly interjected in his typical fashion.

“It’s going to be a priority once we’ve secured the city, don’t worry Kwalski.”

“Affirmative,” both Ruffshot and Kwalski voiced simultaneously before crackling back out.

Push turned off all comms-streams momentarily, balled his tired eyes under his goggles and wished he could rub them, just for a second. “Fuck boys, just get back safely, just get back safely...” He was a flood of emotion; the initial elation of knowing his child and wife were alive had soon dissipated with the realisation that they were now in more danger than before. With the very real risk of imminent death from leaping vampires or stray bullets, all he could do now was hope, the same as he had been doing.

He sprung his eyes open, the glow of the screen, currently displaying one of the probes swooping through the tall skyscrapers of Manhattan Island. Its AI pilot guiding it through the concrete jungle, between the epic pillars of steel and glass, feeding him with images of the absolute carnage on the ground. Drawing out everything with the typical lines of their sight. Over the Mist, the Mist that was getting redder as the minutes passed by. He quickly composed himself and collated ideas on what it could be, before noticing another pulsating red square in the top right corner of his vision.

“Tokyo, Burrows here, where are we?” Push spoke to the monster.

“Burrows! We’re in the HQ. Second Assault Team have moved up here with me and we’re protecting the entrance, vampiric threat reducing all the time, residual numbers now. You need to patch through to Lieutenant Nano Rino, he’s leading first assault team through to the core now. You need to give him any directions and assistance he needs. Confirm, all priority on Lieutenant Rino?” Tokyo stopped, pneumatic sound of his powerfist and the crushing screams of a vampire crackling out through the comms-stream.

“Absolute priority confirmed, TC. Stand your ground at all costs; do not let any of the Vampiric Threat into that facility, do whatever you need to do, I’m re-directing more men your way now. As soon as the facility is secure I will get over there myself.” Push replied, taking full command of the situation. “Wiseman, direct more resource to Ground Zero, we cannot afford to let anything more happen to that facility, it looks like we might have got

lucky.” He directed the GIA head agent sat beside him, who had been quietly pushing orders over to super soldiers across the city as the incursion took place.

“I’m already on it,” He replied.

“Excellent. Colonel, repeat probe scans coming in, vampiric threat minimal city wide, we’re winning the battle here Colonel, I’m taking Lieutenant Rino though Mist HQ, once it’s secured I’m going to take a Mist-Buggie and head over there. As soon as we’ve got the facility up and running and the power generators primed, we can head up operations from there. We’re secure then, we can fit 20k people in the underground tunnels and labs of the base. We’ll have our city back and somewhere to really tackle this mess from, head on.”

Push relayed his thoughts to the Colonel.

“Absolutely, do what you need to do Push, we’re handling the ground effort now. Once we’ve got the finalised probe reports in, we’ll get 50% of the ground forces back on board the bubble ship and over to the Mist HQ, casualties seem reasonable at this moment.” The Colonel shouted, now interrupted by only the most sporadic shots of gunfire.

“Lieutenant Rino. Push Burrows, direct comms stream attached. I’m in your head now, so to speak, Rino.” Push spoke through to the Lieutenant who was leading the 50 strong men that had taken on the task of sweeping the tunnels main entrance and primary level of the Mist HQ at ground zero.

“Good to have you there Burrows, lets get this thing done.” He spoke in his quick Latino tone with a casual hint, unlike the strong American accent of Colonel Michaels. “Where do you want me? I’ve sent 90% of the assault team on sweep and clean priority of the primary level, Ghost-Team 1 and I are now heading toward the main computing facility in the heart. Current vampiric threat experienced minimal, power is completely out, Mist levels throughout the level currently at 90%. We’re keeping our guard.”

“Outstanding Lieutenant, I couldn’t have given you better orders myself. Listen, there’s no easy way out of this one, no short cut home. I’m feeding you through the facilities top-secret blue-prints now.” He tapped at a few buttons on the digital panel in front of him. “We’ve been given access to everything now, thankfully.”

“Hey, no problem,” Wiseman responded quickly with a clever pride in his voice.

“Right, yes, right,” Push answered back, paying little attention as he watched the stream of Rino and his men coming through. The dark, dank and familiar corridors of the Mist HQ, the emergency Mist that had been pumped into them, the LED light beams from the marines goggles penetrating a few feet ahead. The quiet hiss of the comms stream broken by the occasional deep breath of the Lieutenant.

“Sir, it’s all red, I mean, it was red outside, but, look, it’s red in here, and it’s sticking to everything. The Mist, Jesus, what the hell?” Rino spoke through softly, tempering his steps, anxious and moving forward. He turned for a second, releasing one of his hands from his gun and running his gloved fingers down the metallic wall. The surface tension gave way and red streams poured down it, running down to the ground and collecting into small pools at his feet. “What is this, Burrows? It’s like their blood is condensing on everything, and in the Mist, it’s everywhere?” he finished, his smooth Latino tones cracking for a second and giving away fear.

“Erm, yeah, I’ve been thinking about that, look, keep moving, I’ll patch through the Colonel...Priority one patch, Colonel Mann Michaels.”

“Here, Burrows, what is it, we’re on our way back to the ship, finalised probe reports show minimal threat city wide, I’ll be back with you shortly. Can this not wait?” Michaels replied sternly, his attention occupied by organising those around him.

“I’m afraid not, I need you to get a sample of the red Mist that is around you and bring it on board. The whole of the city is turning, I don’t know what it is yet, I wouldn’t want

to theorise...”

“Arh, hell! Burrows, theories are what you do best, I’ve been wondering what this shit is, look, I’ll get someone to collect some up for you. Why, what?” the colonel caught onto the apprehensive tone in Push’s voice. “You don’t think this stuff, what, you don’t think it can be harmful do you?” he finished with a growl.

“I don’t know, I don’t think so, but...”

“But what?!” both the Colonel and Wisman said, simultaneously. Wiseman having been snooping on the comms-stream.

“God damn it. Well, look, the thinned blood of the mutant vampires, well, the mutation, it’s caused by a number of things, one being prolonged thinning of the blood caused by the antiplatelet nature of aspirin in the Mist that we utilize to keep the ghost threat out. Well, the blood of the Vampires seems to have thinned to such an extent that it’s almost gaseous, this might be the case in the dead ones, they decompose quickly, their blood literally that thin that it’s no longer liquid, it’s gas. That’s why they’ve been exploding in puffs when we’ve been shooting them down. Look, the best I can come up with now, it’s a long shot, but I’d say, we’ve shelled the city with fresh mist, we’ve killed tens of thousands of them with bullets exploding and releasing their gaseous mutated blood into the air. Now, the end product, their mutated cells have some how begun to bond with the salicylic acid of Mist.”

“...and salicylic acid is widely used in organic synthesis, one of the reasons we use it, so the Mist-Lungs can breathe the Mist.” Wiseman broke in, adding his partial knowledge on the Mist production process

“Jesus, what, well, can we breath it? I mean, we’ve all got our full sweat suits on and any civilians we’re finding have hair their emergency face hoods on and we’re equipping with civilian grade sweat-suits now. What happens when we take these off, can we breath

this new mist, what the hell is going on Push, another fucking obstacle?!" The colonel raged through the comms-stream.

"Look, Michaels, I don't know, you asked for a theory, you got it, what do you expect from me? The shitstorm's been going on down there, I've been up here, once we secure the Mist HQ I can start experiments, but no sooner." He replied, frustrated, tired, angry at both himself for not knowing the answer and the Colonel for expecting so much of him, so quickly.

"Sirs, we're nearing the Central Computer Repository, here at the centre of the Mist HQ, once we're in, Burrows, I'll need you to direct me, getting this place up and running again isn't going to be any easy task." Rino broke in from the ground.

"Affirmative Lieutenant, I'll direct you. Colonel, get me the sample, I'll get this job done and we'll figure this thing out."

"Very well, Push, I'm on my way." The Colonel crackled out.

"Right, Rino, get your shit together, we'll be entering at the very base of the Lung, it's the central computing point for the Mist HQ and North American Mist production. We get this online, we can get all the major cities operating, not just our own, then we get comms up again between us all and we're one step closer to some semblance of normality again."

"Fuck! Burrows, we've got Threat streaming down this corridor. Fuck, men...positions...fire...will." Rino's voice broke through, cracking up with the gun fire. His streaming display was feeding the horror through to Push, Vampires pouncing toward them through the red mist, down the narrow corridor, no where else to go but straight forward.

One broke through the machine gun fire as they focused their attention on a large mutated labourer type who refused to go down, stamping toward them, clawing outwards. The fine beams of their LED lights cutting through the red Mist, revealing his fanged

mouth.

Horrible gurgling screams followed. “Shit, shit, shit! Quick get it off!” Rino turned and fired two rounds from his powerful Desert Eagle side-arm into the head of the vampire that had broken through, his two other team mates taking up the front, kneeling and continuing to fire. The bursts of flame from their guns lighting up the dark corridor in a strobe like effect, thick with gun smoke, Mist, blood, it was hell like.

Rino pulled the body off his fellow marine, holstering his sidearm, pressing a few buttons on his sweat-suit which brought up an emergency Triage display in his Goggles. He knelt and pressed his hand against his team mate’s neck.

“Fuck, he’s dead!” Rino screamed, turning and running into the middle of his other men who were still firing relentlessly down the narrow corridor. He slammed a fresh cartridge into his rifle and started pumping the air full of lead. Firing aimlessly with rage into the mist, hoping to kill anything that moved.

“Men! Rino! Lieutenant! Lieutenant Nano Rino! The corridor is clear!” Push shouted back down the comms-stream trying to compose the men.

“Shit!” He shouted back, pulling himself to attention, ordering his men to do the same. “What a fucking waste. Fucking vampires. Burrows, where are we?” he asked, trying to compose himself.

Push keyed at the panel in front of him again, “Look one hundred yards up and across and we’re there, that room will be 100% secure, we just need to get in there. Once that’s done, everything else falls into place.” He said, trying to encourage the men. He watched them pass down the corridor, hesitantly stepping over the bodies they had torn up with the prior spray of bullets.

He felt something tugging at his arm as he sat in the command chair, oblivious to the outside world whilst connected to the streams coming in from the field of battle. He

shifted in his seat, trying to concentrate; still the tugging was present, now on both arms.

“Lieutenant, stand fast, there’s something wrong this end.” He spoke to Rino.

“Affirmative,” the Lieutenant and his men came to a halt, their heads shifting from side to side, waiting for their next order.

“What the hell is going on?!” Push screamed as he pulled the comms-link line from his goggles and came back to his own display. The belts tethering him to the command chair zipped back and he stood, bolt upright looking around, before instantly falling down to his knees, bringing his hands back up and over his head.

“Daddy!” the little set of floating eyes came running towards him, bobbing unevenly with her difficult little strides inside her sweat-suit. He held his arms back out and she ran into them, he grabbed her and stood to his feet, folding his arms over her and as his wife walked over to join in their embrace.

“I love you, Push, I knew you’d take care of us,” her calm and touching voice crackled through the comms-stream between them and almost sent him into floods of tears. He pulled them both right into himself, absorbing them, wanting the sensory feedback of skin on skin, to feel her breath against his ear and feel his child’s soft cheek against his own. He had to settle with the coarse fabric inside the sweat suit, the clammy, contained and monitored atmosphere of his protective layers, providing him with a thin, last-resort barrier of defence, one that he now just wanted to be free of.

“Jesus, are you okay, are you okay?” he asked, his voice shaking, his hands almost quivering. “Elizabeth, I love you so much, Jesus, Lilly, my baby, how are you, are you okay, you’re okay right?” He spoke to both of them, balling his eyes inside his suit and imagining their faces in his mind’s eye.

“They’re good Burrows, a real pair you’ve got there, you’re a lucky man.” Ruffshot broke through the comms-stream, walking up close. Push released Lilly to the ground,

opened his embrace from his wife and moved over to Ruffshot. Lilly grabbing onto his leg in her little suit he hobbled over and gave him a very one way hug.

“God, I can’t thank you enough corporal, I owe you big time, anything you want, literally, anything I can get you, just let me know.” Push spoke, still quite emotional.

Ruffshot laughed a quick humble laugh, “Well, you can let go of me for starters Burrows.” He said, pushing him back and kneeling down. “This little one, you kept your eyes shut and held on tight didn’t you? Eh?” he said to Lilly placing his big gloved hand on her hooded head.

“That’s right Rufffossh!” she replied with a giggle before letting go of her fathers leg and running back to her mum.

“Back down to business though, Burrows,” he said standing and pointing at the command chair, “You’ve got men waiting for you. Just let us know where and when you need us, we’ll be in resupply.”

“Yes, yes of course,” Push replied, moving to sit back down in the chair where he had been streaming information from all over the battlefield and conveying it to the men on the ground. “Look, just take Lilly and Elizabeth to my quarters will you, wait, do I even have quarters on here? Take them to the Colonels quarters will you?” He embraced his quiet wife and his jumping child once more. “It’ll all be over soon, trust me, we’re working our way through this.” He let them go and they left through the door, following Ruffshot as he left.

Turning he grabbed the sync-cable and slotting its end into his Goggles he was instantly back on the ground.

“Rino, shit, sorry, any activity?” He asked having regained his composure, forcing the commanding authority that was so necessary back into his tone.

“Negative, nothing through yet, it’s one scary place down here though, I’ll tell you

that. I feel like San Pedro against the Devil, we're winning, but he keeps coming back for more," he finished, making a sound as if he were spitting on the floor.

"Right, well, get moving, down and to the main computer room, we need to get this show on the road, once we've got that HQ up and running we can start shipping over the civilians we're taking on board this end."

"Affirmative." He said quickly and set off. Push followed his visual stream, watching Rino move forward, leading his team through the narrow corridor, still thick with blood red Mist and stepping over mutated vampiric corpses. Their LED head lamps still cutting beams of light into the red and their Goggles drawing the lines of the walls as they walked, before revealing the large pneumatic doors of the central computer room.

"That's it, that's it right there dead ahead. Careful, these things have residual memory of the people they once were, so there might be some computer engineers around, they'll be weak, but, well, keep frosty." Push said to him cautiously.

"I think we can take care of some tech nerds, Burrows," he laughed with a sense of arrogance as they walked up to the code panel they needed to hack to get into the room. "Right, directions, Burrows, what do we...Piruja!" The quick howl of the vampiric threat pierced the Mist, "Mother fucker! Back!" he turned to see another one of their small ghost team having been taken by surprise. The vampire on top of his fellow marine, digging into the base of his neck with violent bites and clawing away fabric from the sweat-suit with piercing nails. Blood spurted high into the corridor as the vampire quickly made its way through the thick material of the neck area and penetrated downwards into the jugular vein of the struggling warrior.

"Fuck you! Puta!" Rino screamed as he drew his desert eagle pistol again and fired a number of rounds into the skull of the gnawing vampire, watching it instantly go limp on top of the now dead marine. "Shit, Push, we're not going to last much longer down here,

I'm hooking into the control panel, get us in here. Dice! Do what you can to hold them back," he shouted at the only other remaining ghost team member. The howls, bloody gurgling and slapping sound of skin on polished marble floors started up again almost instantly. Then the harrowing silence, indicating the animal like leap for blood that had quickly become the signature trait of the vampiric threat.

"Die you sons of a bitches!" Rino shouted, firing his desert eagle over his shoulder, contorted backwards as the threat came shooting through the Mist. Dice stood and began to roar having picked up the machine gun of his dead commarde next to him. Shooting relentlessly into the dark corridor, the barrels of the automatic guns glowing red with heat and vampires dropping out of the Mist, sliding to his feet in a bloody mess.

Lieutenant Rino suspended firing for a second and unhooked the fingertips off his sweat-suit. Gun still in hand he pulled them away jabbed them into two entry ports at the bottom of the doors keypad entry panel.

"Do what you need to do Burrows!" He shouted, turning again to fire at the unrelenting enemy.

"Give me 10 seconds!" Push replied quickly jabbing at the keys on the command-panel in front of him, entering the unnecessarily long emergency override code and watching the horror that Rino was surrounded by.

The door sprang to life, the gigantic locking mechanism spinning open, heavy pistons straining and pulling the 10 inch thick steel doors open slowly. Push watched and willed Rino inside, the glare from the huge pistol obstructing his view slightly. He could just make out Dice getting mauled to death through the bursts of fire from Rino's gun. His Goggled eyes on the ground, floating, writhing from side to side, the glowing barrels of his firearms flaying all over as he let his guns rip into the air, the penetrating sound of automatic fire.

“Get the fuck in the room Rino, he’s gone!” Push shouted, sitting in his chair, almost as if he were there, the restraining belts keeping him from jumping up and onto the floor.

“Fuuuck!” Rino pulled his hand free of the control panel and backed into the room shooting his pistol with one hand, grabbing at his machine-gun with his other. “Die, die, die!” shouting and stepping backwards into the main computer room, shifting to the right and throwing his depleted pistol at the large emergency lock down button that had been drawn out and visualised by his Goggles. The heavy doors shifted their direction and started moving in again, the vampires leaping looking up from Dice’s dead body before leaping, trying to chase Rino into the room through the closing doors.

“Bring it! Hijo de puta!” he roared over the gun fire, the vampires smashing against the slowly closing doors, clambering to get in. Reaching arms with terrible clawed fingers grabbing, swiping, reaching, they piled at the ever narrowing entrance, nothing able to get through. The large pneumatic pistons strained as they crushed the stray limbs that poked through the steel barriers acting like giant crushers.

Rino laughed wildly and ran at the flaying limbs with the butt of his gun, smashing down on arms and skulls, trying to push them out of the gap so the heavy doors could close shut, securing him. Blood spurted forwards, out of the popping skull of one of the vampires before a random arm shot through the tiny gap, slashing at Rino’s face, down and across from forehead to lower jaw. He fell back, dropping his gun and holding his face as the doors snapped shut with one last crush and squirt of flesh and blood.

“Fuck! Rino, are you there? Are you alive? Rino, come in!” Push screamed down the comms stream at the Lieutenant. His display had turned to static as the vampire slashed at Rino’s face, his Goggles being torn through and off by the thick clawing nails of the horrific beast.

“I’m here...” Rino crackled through, hardly audible, coughing and spluttering. “What do you need me to do?” he asked Push.

“Look, just sit tight, there’s back-up on it’s way, we’ll have a medical team with you imminently,” Push replied, relaying orders to other ghost-teams within the base to get down to the main computer room.

“Negative, I’m loosing blood, I’m not letting my men and die for nothing.” His Latino accent crackled through, heavier than before.

“Look, your blind, your Goggles are out, just sit tight, we’ll get you fixed up.” Push replied, almost begging the Lieutenant to listen to him.

“Fuck you, Burrows!” he spat, his mouth sounding as if it was filling up with blood, “I can do something, I can get the power back on and give everyone a fighting chance in this fucked up maze.” He said, getting to his feet. “Look, I can see, my Goggles are out but my eyes still work, let me get the power on.” He returned the begging plea to Push.

“You’re a good man, Lieutenant.” Push replied. “Move around the main-terminal in the middle of the room, to the back, there’s an opening. Get into the middle of the bank of computers and go down the ladder,” he began directing him.

“Done, I’m down here,” he finally replied, his voice getting deeper with every gurgling breath.

“Right, on each side of the octagon shaft you’re now stood in are the main coolant resistor plates, you need to take each one out in order, clockwise, and then push them back in, again, in a clockwise fashion. That’ll trip the system and restart the power. Get that done and we’ve got a start.”

Rino reached out having lied to Push he was just about able to see through one eye, the other torn out by the slash of the vampire, his face streaming blood. He grabbed at each panel, blindly flicking the unlock mechanism and feeling them rise out of the wall.

One after another, until they were all out.

“I’m putting them back in,” he said to Push. He flicked the retract switch on each, his breathing heavy and deep. Collapsing to his knees and falling forward as the last panel as it retracted back into its slot. The narrow shaft not permitting him to fall, leaning up against the shaft wall he heard the whirring sound of power quickly flowing back through the base.

“You did it Rino! You did it!” Push yelled at him as he watched the comms-streams of other Lieutenants, flicking quickly throughout the complex maze of corridors and small rooms that made up the Mist Production HQ. The devastation and rabid horror of what had been happening became apparent as the UV lights twitched before springing into life. Filling the rooms and corridors with their light, making the red Mist glow like consuming red wool, all surrounding, much like it was becoming outside, their UV rays barely penetrated.

Just enough of the lethal electromagnetic radiation crept through and aided the microcosm of battle that was taking place. The massively underestimated numbers of Vampiric threat that still walked inside the HQ began to melt, steaming and bubbling under the UV in front the marines who continued to pummel them with rounds of hot lead, screaming and roaring with victory.

“Good, my brothers and I, we, we didn’t die for nothing then, eh? Push, you just, make sure, just get us out of this mess, alright?” Rino asked before letting out a long drawn out breath, gurgling blood. The comms-stream reverberated with the thud as his limp body fell down to the bottom of the shaft and then terminated, leaving just a hissing silence.

“Jesus.” Push paused, turning back to the static stream of the now dead Lieutenant Nano Rino. “Damn right I’m going to figure this thing out Rino, for you, all the other fallen, for the future, for my wife and children.” He spoke, knowing there would be no answer as he stood and unplugged his Goggles from the terminal.

“Colonel, you’re here already?” Push opened up, slightly surprised as Michaels

entered into the command room.

“No fucking around here, Push. We’ve got the ground under control now, I’ve placed orders for the clear up already. Body cremation is getting under way soon, we’ve got a lot to contend with before this hell whole is cleared up, Jesus, but we’re in charge now. All civilians without mutation are being given sweat-suits or emergency face-hoods, whatever is available. So, hopefully that’ll buy us some more time, what you think?” He said, marching up to Push before turning to follow him as he walked briskly passed and left the room. “Wait, where the hell are you going?”

“Good shout on the sweat-suits, filtering their air will definitely prolong any further mutations in the mean time, but we can’t continue like that indefinitely. Christ, we over come one obstacle and another one...” Push stopped in the hallway, now busy with marines and soldiers and civilians, their eyes streaming past him, turning to the Colonel. “Anyway, I’m going to see my family, they’re in your quarters, I asked Ruffshot to put them there for the time being.” He turned and started walking again. “We must get over to the Mist HQ, and I mean right this second Michaels. Some very brave men got the power back on, the UV lights are back on and have killed any remnants of the Threat. We need to get back over there so I can get started with my experiments.” He finished, striding and dodging through the racing people.

“Right, right, good, excellent Push, hey, listen.” The colonel turned him around, “You okay? That was some fucked up shit that just went down, I’ve lost men before, but civilian casualties like that, seriously, you’re a science man, how you keeping it together?” He finished, compassion almost making its way into his battle hardened tones.

“I’m good Michaels,” Push said, reaching the colonel’s quarters and hitting the open button on the panel at the side of the door. “Just get us over to that HQ, get us sorted out will you? Listen, I just need a minute with my family. Shout me when we’re there.”

“You got it Burrows,” Michaels replied, turning and walking into the now red Mist of the ship.

Chapter 6 – It worked

“That doesn’t discount the fact your beast fucked up does it, Wiseman?” Michaels said to the small man across the table. He puffed his cigar as he waited for a reply in the small, secure room of the Ground Zero Mist Lung and Mist Production HQ, deep underground again, debating their next actions and waiting for the word from Push.

“Look Colonel,” Wiseman finally coughed through the smoke, “He made a judgement call, like any officer would in the field of war. He made the call and men died, right, I admit that, it wasn’t his fault that the vampiric threat inside the HQ was much larger than expected. Circumstance dictates action, and it needed to happen at that moment in time.” He finished.

“So we’re decided are we?” the colonel quickly replied with a sarcastic tone, “We’re calling ‘it’ a ‘he’ now? It’s earned that honour has it? Right, I see, I see how it is?” He folded his arms across his chest, chewing down on the stump of cigar in his mouth, speaking through his teeth. “We’ll it’s going to have to do a little bit more to earn my respect, I’m afraid Wiseman.”

“What the hell do you mean Michaels?! Jesus, our estimates show it almost singlehandedly killed three thousand vampires, in little over an hour and half, hundreds with its bare hands. Even the men attached to him say he saved their lives countless times, he may not be human, but we can give him some dignity.”

The Colonel snarled, “I’ve seen the streams from my Lieutenants, I’ve seen them dying needlessly, being sent in when they should have held back for longer, so fuck you, Wise man,” putting particular emphasis on separating the man’s name.

“Gentlemen, not interrupting anything am I?” Push appeared on the screen mounted on the wall at the end of the rectangular room. A small comms-area, deep in the heart of

the Mist HQ, secure and vented of Mist, it was left with a blood-red residue all over.

Polished steel walls trickled with the remnants of the gaseous blood that had combined with the Mist.

“Arh, hell,” Michaels replied, “Just these god damn amphetamines getting the best of me, I’m not as young as I once was.” He stubbed out his cigar. “Right, Push, give us the news.”

“Right, yes, of course. I’ll start with the good news. Well, in the few hours we’ve had we’ve brought power and Mist back city wide, we’re currently at 90% efficiency. The mist the shelling produced just about held out, which meant in the whole incursion we’ve seen only four Ghost related fatalities.” He said, his image on the screen, looking slightly stupid to the Colonel and Wiseman, wearing his white lab coat over his sweat-suit in his old office, surrounded by red Mist. “The vampiric threat is now under control, well as far as it can be. Teams will begin sweeping in shifts to take out any that were missed and pull out any civilians in the similar manner. We’ve got all the transport we’ve been able get working bringing people here for kitting out, we’re currently at capacity with 20k military and civilian personnel. Once fitted with either their emergency face hoods or sweat suits civilians are being taken to the mist-apartments around grand central station where a military presence will remain. We’re going to have two large populations in the city, here at HQ and at Grand Central apartments, where we might reach another 20k if we’re lucky, from first estimates. The clear up operation as ordered by you, Michaels. is steadily disposing of the bodies, but this is where the bad news comes in.”

“Jesus, what the hell is it now? God damn werewolves?!” The Colonel leant back in his chair and looked up at the ceiling.

“Well, it’s the blood in the Mist. My testing is getting under way now but nothing in terms of results yet. However, the decomposing bodies of the mutated vampiric threat

continue to release blood into the air. My preliminary tests have again reaffirmed my early theories, that as the bodies decompose, the blood thins to a point it becomes gaseous, when the skin is pierced, well, it escapes into the air. What this means for us? I don't know yet, more testing is needed, as long as everyone keeps their emergency face hoods or sweat-suits on, in unsecure environments like the area you're in now, we should have some time to experiment and figure this out. But, well, as you can imagine the quicker we get all the bodies burnt, the better, we've got airborne mutated cells that's settling across the city, and probably across the northern continent now, Jesus, who know what this will cause. We've got to get the tens of thousands of bodies we're dealing with city wide burnt, but we're running on a limited number of troops, so it's going to take time."

Michaels leant forward and let out a long breath. "Fuck, well, we're better off now than we were 12 hours ago, at least we've got that, but we're still barrelled in the shit cannon of doom. Thank you, Push, can we communicate with anyone outside of New York yet?" He finished, looking at the screen and shaking his head.

"I was just about to come to that. The comms experts we've got have been working on not frying the emergency comms-gate-network and have done pretty well. We've not got a secure holo-stream here like the GIA headquarters have, but over the last hour I've seen the North American Mist Grid coming back to life. All good signs there are survivors. I've not tried anything yet, but if the grid bears true, we can throw comms-streams together with Boston, Chicago where General Ironhans is currently based as well as Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco, Miami, Huston and a host of other cities nationally." Push replied, simultaneously jabbing at his stream-panel in his hand and something off screen.

"Do it, do it now, Push, we need to see how these other cities are. Get a multiple comms-stream established, I want any city showing any sign of life talking with me, now." He bumped his fist off the panel in front of him lightly and gritted his teeth.

“Just as well I prepped for such a request, I thought you’d want to get straight to it. I’m just pulling up the idents, Colonel, comms-stream establishing...” he replied, quickly prodding and tinkering, turning to shout some orders at other technicians and engineers in the room.

The speakers in the room crackled and the Colonel and Wiseman both looked at them as if to watch for a sign of life.

“Chicago – Stream connected. Is that you New York? Who am I talking to?” An unfamiliar voice said directly in an American accent.

“This is New York, you’re speaking with Colonel Mann Michaels. Goggle ident 64-32-90-B-H, security clearance level Alpha-Niner. Get me General Ironhans immediately.” He said back to the voice as others came streaming in.

“Los Angeles – Stream connected! New York?!”

“Huston – Stream connected! Jesus, New York, you gave us quite a fright there!”

“San Francisco – Stream connected. Outstanding, who have we got here?”

The anonymous military voices kept coming until all the remaining pockets of population across the North American Continent had connected. The highest ranking officer in each area sitting and listening intently to hear the state of their nation, how many had survived the last two days. What they were currently dealing with. The horror they all faced.

“General Ironhans here, Michaels, is that you?” The gruff voice of the general filtered through the speakers as the last cities established and voiced their connections.

“I’m here General, good to hear your voice, how is Chicago fairing?” Michaels replied.

“We’re in bad shape, I’m sending you over our status report now, you need to collate all of our numbers and analyse what you can, you’ve got the scientists there at the

Mist HQ, we're not equipped. Now, tell me what you know." The general said, quickly silencing all other parties on the line.

The Colonel started chewing down on another cigar and lighting it before releasing a low growl, rubbing his three day old stubble and beginning. "Good. Listen people, it's good to hear we've still got you in your respective cities, not all is lost, but that's where the good news ends I'm afraid. We've had extremely heavy civilian losses, this mutated vampiric threat has taken a sizable chunk away from the precious few that were left. We're all in mourning, we've all seen some terrible things. Fucking vampires," he rubbed his temple with his free hand. "But, hell! We're still fighting! We're waiting to gain comms-streams with some other major pockets of population, things look bleak, but we're holding fast. Let me render this down, I'm analyzing your reports as we speak."

He puffed hard, polluting the air again with thick cigar smoke, Wiseman watching it weave to the ceiling in the small room and disperse before focusing his attention back on the Colonel. "The Tokyo Colliders have been a resounding success from what I'm getting back here. Nationally we've taken a pounding, but the extra troops and the Collider project that the GIA have aided us with turned the tide." He nodded toward Wiseman in a sign of respect. "Mist production is coming back online as are comms and power. Civilians are being equipped with breathing apparatus, cities are under marshal law, but there's little we can do about that. We have gained control, almost as quickly as it was taken away from us gentlemen. Outstanding work. But you must realise, we're the ones in charge now, not only over and above the Vampiric threat, but over any stable government, and at this time we need prudence." He finished and paused, jeers and short claps came from the streams across the nation in a typically militaristic fashion, quickly cutting out.

The colonel switched tones, "Listen..." He began, "We're not looking at any easy way out of this. You are all reporting your Mist turning red through the gaseous blood of

the Vampiric threat. Gentlemen, as the General just pointed out, we're in the best shape here in New York to analyse this threat, we've got the best scientists and facilities here in the Mist Production HQ and we're going to work around the clock to figure out what is to be done about this. In the mean time, protect your civilian populations and maintain order, those are our objectives." He sucked deeply on his cigar, talking as the smoke escaped from his mouth, "I'll establish a comms-stream like this every six hours for check-in and updates. We're on a quest for answers now gentlemen, including a remedy for the mutations. In the mean time the very survival of the human race could depend on what happens over the next 24 hours. There's been no sound from anyone outside of our own North American network yet, they could all be dead for all we know. General, do you have anything to add?" He finished, turning again to the speaker in the ceiling of the room.

"No, Colonel, you have my full approval for all that you've just said. Let me reiterate, we're an army, but we're also a protective force. Men you're the highest ranking officers we have left in your respective areas, you must remain in control. These are trouble times. Keep alert, that's all I'm going to say. Keep alert and we'll get through this, and we'll all be better off." He finished

Michaels clasped his hands together, "Excellent, expect to hear from me in six hours. If you have anything to report open up a comms-stream immediately, do not let anything pass us by, all scientific information you come across is to be sent to us as well. Colonel Mann Michaels, Ground Zero Mist Lung and Mist Production Headquarters, out." He separated his hands and moved one of them across his neck, indicating to Push to kill the stream. Each of the cities ended communications one by one and the Colonel rose to his feet.

Walking around the table he slapped his gloved hand down on the shoulder of Wiseman. "Listen, both of you, I'm going to get four hours sleep, I've not closed my eyes

since this fucking catastrophe kicked off and it's obviously going to start effecting my judgement soon. Whilst we've got a lull, I'm getting my head down. Push, you keep working. Wiseman, do whatever the fuck you like. I really couldn't give a shit." He finished, dropping his cigar to the floor and stamping on it before pulling his sweat-suit hood back over his head.

Wiseman turned to face him with a look of contempt. "I'm going to continue my de-brief and analysis with Tokyo Collider, we've got so much data to get through. Naturally, everything his brain does is recorded for analysis once he is extracted out of the field of battle. We can learn from his thoughts and actions, give him better orders next time, improve his killing efficiency." He finished in his typical pompous tone.

"Colonel, I'll keep at it here like you said, I'll have a full analysis ready for you when you get back. Go get some rest Michaels, if anyone's deserved it, it's you." Push responded before he turned, walking into the red mist and disappearing out of view, the screen went black and turned itself off.

"Excellent, Push, speak to you in four hours." The colonel replied, crackling through his comms-stream through to Push, the other side of the complex. He walked out of the small room and hit the corridor with a good pace. His legs were tired and his guard was beginning to drop. The bravado, the puffed out chest, the walk with a purpose, the 'I'm graduate from the University of Getting Things the Fuck Done', were starting to wear thin as his current dose of amphetamines wore off. He didn't want another dose, he wasn't even sure if he could take it, he was getting older all the time, as he liked to remind himself, and as strong as he was, he just could not push himself as much as he used to.

Not like he could in the traditional wars, what he wouldn't give to fight against men again. A real enemy, one with honour and pride and skill and just as full of shit as men always were. Back in the indo-china wars, supporting, training, teaching men how to kill

other men, and when absolutely necessary, bagging a few himself. Killing something with flesh and bone, looking your opponent right in the eye, or simply hunting him in the night, in a fight to the death. War, it seemed to have more of a meaning back then.

He laughed at himself as he continued to march along the corridors, the UV light barely penetrating the emergency Mist being pumped through the normally Mist free HQ. He laughed at the concept of fighting with meaning, what a load of bullshit he thought. All he'd ever done before was fight for some slime-ball politicians that were scared because of the short men who liked to whisper, or the men who wanted oil, or some other god forsaken natural resource that was in too short supply. When he really cared to think about it these days, he knew now it was all flipped, he had a meaning to fight, a real meaning, to save the human race, but he no longer had anyone to fight against. Just the Ghost Threat, as it had been dubbed. He half thought the human race had gone completely crazy some times, just imagining the whole thing. A grandiose delusion, mass hysteria planet wide. Forget about it, he thought to himself, you don't got the time.

He walked along the corridors, hands clasped behind his back, his goggles streaming him information, drawing out the lines as they always did. Fellow marines shuffling past him, offering a three fingered salute as they passed him, their tips flashing bright with colour as they rose their hands, pulsating with red, white and blue colour.

He hit the panel on the wall as he approached his office and its doors shifted open. What he wouldn't give for a secure room like that bastard Wiseman had back at the GIA HQ, at least then he could get out of this god damn suit, get cleaned up for the first time since he had put it on. The shitty self-filtration system hadn't been perfected in the time they had, bumbling scientists still worked on trying to get it right, but the suits were always too hot and could give you serious trench foot if you spent over a week in one. God damned scientists.

He grabbed the bottle of whiskey off the side and moved to sit down on the leather couch at the side of his office. Pulling the emergency ration tether from the side of his sweat-suit's hood he tongued the attachment inside his hood and attached the free end to the bottle. He pulled hard at the straw with his mouth and leant back into the couch as the whiskey washed down his throat, warming his belly and taking the final edge off the amphetamines.

He powered down his goggles and embraced the black. Images of warfare still embedded on the oils of his eyes, he had no idea how he could cope so easily with viewing such atrocity, from his past tours and even more so from the previous 48 hours. He'd seen some mess before, but this took the cake, everything there could be was dead, killed by various unholy means. Children eaten by their vampiric mutant parents, the young and strong, injury free, dead on the floor, having had their brain scooped clean by the Ghosts. Entire platoons of Marines, weapons still in hand, dead on the floor, Ghost Threat attack, then ravaged and eaten by Vampires. It was a fucking mess.

But he could cope, almost without blinking an eye. He had always been this way, borderline psychopath, just able to hold back the rampant urges that sometimes sprang into his mind and tried to override his body. Tried to bypass his morals and get him to do horrible things. Although sometimes, those emotions won him over, they drove him beyond the point that your average marine would find acceptable. But he always put that down to why he'd managed to stay alive for so long, he'd killed more men than cancer and had a few bullets thrown his way, and that's not including all the grenades, mortars, rockets, incendiary devices, bombs, oh god, he thought, the list went on, and what did he have to show for it? A bunch of medals, a couple of scars, a rebuilt foot, a list of insubordination that stopped him ever getting above his current rank, a lousy life and one friend in the whole world.

He swam in his mind, looking for some good, something pleasant to help him drift off to sleep. All he found was war and fighting and brutality and horror. And then he thought of his companion, the one person that had broken down his barriers, one of the few people he actually respected, outside of having to because of military rank. Push Burrows. How they'd first met in the Mist Production HQ after the Mist had fallen. He hated him to start, a cocky college boy, just like all the rest of them, he thought. Strutting around the HQ like he was the be all and end all of the human race, like they relied on him and him alone for their protection. Not realising that it was grunts like Michaels that lost their lives whilst he gaffed around with scientists and theories and analysis.

He remembered back to their first real talk, how he was almost touched by his humility, how he learned that all he wanted to do, all he cared about was creating a better existence for his family. The young and beautiful wife he had, carrying their first child. How, completely selflessly he had undertaken the task, that would eventually lead to the protection of the human race from the Ghost Threat. The one enemy as a soldier, as marine he had fought, and the one enemy he'd come across he couldn't defeat. If it had a pulse Michaels could kill it, kill it dead. But a ghost, that was something different.

Push had done him a bigger favour than he realised back then, he'd pulled off what the all needed him to do. He protected them against the invisible enemy, one that could destroy them all. All Michaels wanted to do was fight, to strive against the enemy and wipe it out, by whatever means. But he couldn't, how could you kill an enemy that essentially didn't exist? He glugged another shot of whiskey down and focused his eyes, looking through his mind at the first one he'd ever seen.

Not much bigger than a regular person, almost completely transparent, with light purple edges, blue in the middle, humanoid in shape, swimming gracefully through the air without meaning or purpose.

“Men,” Commander Fluxor called their attention, standing deep inside the Nimitz Class USS Gorge Washington. In a large hangar area, before them a box within a box, between the two layers was the first production of the Mist, they’d trapped one and they were trying to learn from it.

“This is you floating ethereal body, or Feb, as we’ve come to call her. This is the first one we’ve been able to look up close at, a lot of men died getting this thing inside there. No communications at this time, analysis is coming up short, we don’t seem to be able to harm or kill it, just trap it with this Mist that has been created. All we know now is that they exist in a form that we can see them by ectoplasmatic matter, ‘scraped’ from the bio-neuro-electricity of humans.” Christ, that whole ship bought the farm just a week after I’d been transported back to the mainland to help train and prep the first Ghost Marines, he thought. 3000 men and women, one ghost, those were the sorts of odds they were up against. He shook his head inside his sweat-suit hood, they’d all almost bought the farm, it was his old buddy, Push who had given his all to save them. As strong as he was, he could fight as much as he wanted but his mind would never be as beautiful as Push’s and that meant he’d always be a step behind.

“I know all this stuff, you see” Push looked up from his glass of beer, “And it’s put me in a position that lets me figure out how to save my family, at least for the time being, that’s it Michaels.” Push shrugged his shoulders with his typical humility. “I keep my brain ticking over and my family lives. I’ll have a beautiful daughter soon, that’s all I care about. Honestly, you’re a good man, but, I don’t even care about myself as much as I do those two. The fact that what I’ve helped create saves us all, well, that’s just a lucky by-product I guess.” He pictured him in his minds eye, both of them sat in that bar as he took out a little photo of his wife from his wallet.

He pulled down another glug of whiskey and huffed a laugh whilst his mind shifted

to Wiseman, the little weasel looking bastard. How he'd knocked his lights out back in the academy, that bar fight over women, booze fuelled. Christ, they could drink and party all night back then, and still be good for field exercises and training before the crack of dawn, he thought.

Of course, Wiseman was never cut out for it, an unfortunately short man with health problems and an attitude to boot, he just wasn't physically equipped to be a soldier, or a marine for that matter.

Coming from a family of war hero's, somewhere genetics had played a trick on the Wiseman family and given them a duff son. He'd tried his best, but he just couldn't hack it. He got under everyone's nose, trying to ride on the past glories of his family, everyone hated him, and he held back his respective trainees. That fateful night, Michaels thought as he lifted his hand and clenched his fist, imagining the small scar on his knuckles that still remained from the bar brawl that ensued.

He was glad to see the back of him after that night, his family got him transferred from basic to the CIA where everyone thought he'd be more readily equipped to handle things. Then when the Ghosts arrive he was pivotal in the fall of the old CIA and it's reformation into the new GIA, there to investigate the Ghost Threat, to try and weaponise the Mist so they could fight back, but it was more just a grab for power from an ever weakening government. They quickly got the legislation they needed to form the Mist Gendarmerie passed and they started recruiting.

There to protect the civilian population, more like to keep them in check. Between the Mist itself and the Gendarmerie, life was pretty tough on regular people. Wiseman continued to erode the government's powers as much as he could. He was like that, clever, greasy, like a politician, no honour, just the continual need for more power. Well it didn't look like he was going to be getting close to that any time soon, Michaels thought. If there

was one set of people that wouldn't let a little shitball like Wiseman grab hold of it in a time of trouble, it was the North American Ghost Marine Corps. As long as we're around, he thought, the people will be safe, we'll keep an eye on our bit of the world.

He slipped down, sideways on the couch as he fell asleep, half on half off, the exhaustion and whiskey taking over, the bottle dropped out of his hand and split on the floor. Its brown liquid splashing, the emergency-ration-tether cleverly wound itself back into his hood and he drifted into a deep sleep.

Chapter 7 – It made us red

“Burrows, what have we got?” Michaels walked into the main lab of the Mist HQ, still sounding a little groggy from his short sleep and noticing Push shaking his head.

Push turned from the panel he had been tapping his fingers on and saw the floating eyes of Michaels hurrying toward him. He let out a short cough, “Michaels, good to see you up and about, you feeling any better?”

He cleared his throat and tapped the side of his sweat-suit hood, as if to knock the final bit of sleepiness out of his mind. “Not much, but I know my brain is thanking me, at least in some weird capacity. Why were you shaking your head, what’s going on? I thought I said wake me if anything important happens?” the authority having completely entered back into his voice by the time he finished speaking.

“Well, we’re getting some strange reports coming in from the clear up teams Michaels, they’re on about a 50% clear sweep of the city –“

“What do you mean strange reports, what did I just say, anything strange, report to me straight away,” he butted in, anger coming in his voice.

“Listen, this just came in, literally two minutes ago, I was just digesting it and was going to wake you, you’re here now, okay? Get your head straight. Listen, they’re saying the bodies they’re picking up, well, they’re twitching, and moving around, they don’t know what’s going on, look...” Push jabbed again at a few buttons on the panel in front of him and a stream from a Corporal on the ground was instantly in front of Michaels’ eyes. He took a step back, as if the imagery had had some sort of physical effect on him.

“Jesus, fuck, what the hell is that, it looks like they’re having a god damn seizure or something, what bodies are these? I don’t see any injury on that one, is that just one that’s been attacked by a ghost. What the –“ he trailed off, not quite knowing

what to say, hoping Push would fill him in with what was going down.

“Michaels, I don’t know what it is, but fucking look at this,” Push replied, killing the stream to the Colonel’s goggles and pointing down at the panel in front of him. It had lit up, dozens of requests for comms-streams coming in from platoons across the city, some sweeping for the enemy, some on burn detail. The lights flashing through the red-mist in front of them. Push’s goggle display going crazy with comms-request all of a sudden. He stood up, next to the Colonel, as if to be close to him, the protection that he offered.

“Jesus fucking Christ. Get me Ruffshot, his team is on burn detail on at the main fire over at central park, look” he pointed down at the panel, “Find him, patch me through immediately.

Push moved his hand on the panel, looking for the correct goggle ident. After a few seconds he found that of Corporal Ruffshot, requesting a Comm-stream, the same as all the others. “Patching you through now Colonel, I’ll also be on the stream.

“Ruffshot, Comms-stream established, what the hell is going on down there Corporal?” Colonel Michaels said sternly down the microphone. Silence. Nothing came back through.

“Push, what the hell is wrong with this thing?!” he shouted knocking the side of his head.

“Nothing, nothing, it’s working, the comms-stream is established, look—” a whirring sound interrupted Push, like all the air was being sucked out of a room, a vacuum was being created. “Static, what the fuck is wrong with this thing,” Push slammed his fist down on the panel in front of him.

“THEY’RE COMING BACK TO LIFE! FUCK! KWALSKI, FOSTER THREE OCLOCK! DIE MOTHERFUCKER!” Ruffshot bust through the comms-stream with

intense ferocity and fear in his voice, the sound of automatic gun fire in the background. “FUCK, THEY’RE NOT DIEING, WHAT THE FUCK IS THIS!” he burst through again, this time the fear in his tone taking over.

“Whu, what?” The colonel said in a moment of complete panic and confusion. His adrenal gland pumped and reflexively he hit the small keyboard on his forearm in the correct code to inject a powerful mix of amphetamines. “Ruffshot! Visual comms-stream connect, priority alpha-one! Immediate patch. What the hell is going on down there?!”

“Fucking end of the line, that’s what Colonel!” Kwalski shouted through the comms-stream, automatically connected when the stream established between the group.

“Live-comms-stream established.” Push said as images live from the scene jumped into their displays. “Oh. My. God.” He fell to his knees, as he heard the Colonel roar through the stream. Their displays showing the wild terror that was ensuing all around Ruffshot and the Dirty Dogs.

“Fuck this shit!” Ruffshot screamed, “Men, evacuate, fall back! By the numbers! Conserve your ammo! Men, on me! On me! EVERYONE!” he shouted to his small ghost-team as they rounded up beside him and tried to gain the attention of anyone else who would listen.

They stood fixed for a moment, watching the madness ensure around them, hundreds gone completely insane with what was taking place, unable to contemplate what was happening, and for a split second as a space opened up in front of them in a moment of awful calm, they reached the peak of absolute terror.

The gigantic fire raging a few hundred yards away, its fierce flames pushing their light through the blood red Mist. As wide as a football pitch and just as deep, the orange glow reached up into the sky, pushing out gigantic plumes of black smoke from the thousands of burning bodies. Its thick soot mixing with the red mist and the ginger blaze of

the enormous fire, raging and crackling in the background. The roar was almost deafening, such was the ferocity with which it burned and consumed the bodies of the humans and vampiric threat.

There was another sound, something else mixed in with the burning horror, it was worse, it was a loud groan, escalating by the second, emanating from the fire, coming towards them. They were surrounded by death, the black ashes floating down like a fatal snow, the emphatic fire, the red Mist hanging in the air around them, blocking their vision, the sounds of gunfire and death all around. And the groans, a merciless environment that seemed to have one purpose; to destroy the will of men.

“This is Hell,” Push finally spoke, physically shaking now, falling further, from his knees to all fours, his hands out in front of him.

“Don’t you be fucking sick on me, Burrows.” The Colonel replied, grabbing his arm and pulling him to his feet whilst simultaneously grabbing the correct code on his forearm to inject a reasonable dose of amphetamines.

He let out a sizeable scream as the sweat-suit pushed a line of needles into his arms and injected their serum. “Right, Jesus, fuck!” he bolted upright before jumping into a rudimentary fighting stance, his head shifted from side to side.

“Ruffshot, what the hell is going on, stand your ground! I want a closer look at these things, what are they, more vampires!? Give me information!” The colonel demanded of his men.

“Colonel, they’re coming out of the god damn fire, the bodies we’ve just thrown on it, they’ve fucking coming back to life. The sound, it’s...it’s like nothing I’ve ever heard before. Colonel, this situation is beyond anything I’ve ever seen. The devil lies here!” Ruffshot said with an air of mad-panic in his voice.

“Listen, keep yourself together, I’ve got your stream here, I know what you’re

dealing with. God damn it Ruffshot, you've got one concern now, keeping your self and your men alive. Looks like you're going to be needed! Now, move up, bag some, get a good look, get your ass back to HQ,"

"Affirmative, Colonel." He said back instantly, as if a switch had clicked in his head. Turning off emotion, turning off natural fear and reaction and turning on all the mechanisms needed to cope with such unrelenting terror, turning on his training, turning him back into a ghost marine. "Men, on me, we're on reconnaissance for Colonel Michael's information gather, evade and return to base. Davis, Foster, cover fire, Kwalski, you're with me, move out."

"Are you fucking insane!?" Kwalski retorted, standing his ground as Ruffshot moved off.

He turned to face him and without even saying a word, without seeing his face, surrounded by sounds of death and images of roaring hell, he knew he meant business and he'd kill him with his own bare hands if he put up any more resistance.

"Okay, Jesus, I'm coming," he back down and started off.

Moving through the Mist slowly, their goggles struggling to cope with the enormity of the data that was streaming from the fire that was raging in the background, they stuck close to each other, guns mounted in their shoulders, ready for anything.

The groans became louder as the soot became thicker until the air was swamped by the crackling roar of fire and the death like toll of the new entity they had just come across.

"Oh fuck me! Fire! kill em! Kill em all!" Ruffshot shouted as they came close enough to view the devastation on the edges of the fire. A wall of melted flesh and bone emerging from the raging glow, limping, struggling to walk, groaning with pain, their arms raised up in front of them.

The dead, coming back to life, taking slow steps with their mangled limbs, steaming, smoking, some still partially on fire. Overrun with holes and savage gut heaving wounds, they seemed to move with no purpose, but moved never the less and they moved through their hail of bullets. Not stopping, they shot off their legs and the legless torso crawled toward them with its arms. They shot off the heads and the headless bodies continued to walk, they pummelled their bodies with grenades and the exploded mess all over quivered with motion, completely detached. Death was their enemy.

“Fuck! Corporal, look at this!” Foster shouted from the back right of Ruffshot. He turned away from firing at the moving wall of the dead and took a few steps toward Foster who was firing at a large, over turned dumper truck. Its contents spilled out onto the ground, hundreds of bodies, some quivering, some having huge heaving seizures, some kneeling down and eating the brains of the others that had not yet reanimated and seemingly growing in strength as they picked up one emptied body and launched it at other invading walking dead. Ruffshot started firing, scattering bullets across the groaning crowd to little effect. A big one stood up from scooping out the brains of a dead mutant vampire and turned to face Ruffshot and his men, before starting over toward them.

“Fire, fucking kill it!!” he shouted over his comms-stream, as the other members of his Ghost team turned to join him. Limbs and flesh streamed away from the undead man striding toward them, “Shoot its fucking legs off!” Within a split second its torso was crawling toward them, pulling itself across the ground.

“Goggle, Eye count, immediate numbers, initiate.” Ruffshot spoke to his goggles and turned in a 360 degree circle as his men continued to shoot at anything that they could make out. His goggle searched for any other sets of goggles within a 300 feet radius and streamed their information back to him, including their distance from him. They picked out another half dozen men still on their feet and dozens of other soldiers and marines pinged

with a red glow from the floor, indicating they were no longer alive.

“Right, I’ve seen enough. Colonel, satisfied!?” He spoke through his stream.

“Get your asses out of their Ruffshot. Fuck, we’re going to get this thing figured out and get back to you on a city wide broadcast momentarily. Get the men together you can find and get your asses back to the Mist HQ by whatever means necessary!” Michaels shouted through the comms-stream to him, disgusted by the evil he had witnessed through the stream.

“Ruffshot, Burrows here,” Push jumped in before the stream went down, “Look, don’t engage the enemy, at least the ones that are coming back to life, whatever they are, the Zombie things.”

“Fucking zombies!?” Kwalski shouted, “Now this is fucked up, we’re fucking fighting zombies, vampires and ghosts now?! I am seriously going to lose my shit!”

“Keep your shit packaged and tight Kwalski,” Ruffshot replied, still firing his gun at the wall of dead flesh as they edged off backwards away from the fire and out of central park. “What do you mean, don’t engage them, they’re the fucking living dead, what do you expect us to do?” he finished, still shouting, his tone acquiring an air of confusion.

“Look, that big one you just shot up, it didn’t give a shit about you until you attacked it, just leave the fucking things alone, conserve your ammo for any more vampires you might encounter.” Push replied, deadly serious, the amphetamines the Colonel ordered up for him running through his veins, pumping blood through his brain, giving him fresh clarity and insight to analyse what was going on around them faster than before.

“Affirmative! Men, cease fire, just fucking run!” The gunfire stopped immediately and the sound of their boots came clattering through, the sound of the groans and fire dying behind them. “Priority stream, level one, all comms available, immediate 1k vicinity, emergency code Six, Niner, Charlie.” Ruffshot spoke into his goggles, still running,

opening up a comms-stream to anyone alive within a 1 kilometre radius of his sweat suit.

“Priority transmission. Immanent comms-stream from Colonel Michaels, in the mean time, everyone on me, we’ve evacuating, drop what you’re doing and get back to the Mist HQ. People, no doubt you’ve seen the, well, whatever the hell it is that’s going on, if not you’re lucky, whatever you’re doing drop it, head to Mist HQ for debrief and re-equip. Ruffshot out.” His team ran up the West Drive exit of the park, through the Mist, now thinning with soot but just as red as ever. Glowing goggled eyes running up to him, shouting their names, goggle idents and where they were from as they got close.

“Push, I need a comms-stream with the other cities connected immediately. I’m making my way down to the secure room now, I’ll get Wiseman on the way. I’ll be there within minutes. Get everyone on the line,” The colonel said to his old friend, directing him to sit back down in his command-chair in the laboratory. “And Push, you’ve got those few minutes to think what the fuck is going on here again. 4 minutes to piece this together, do what you can. I think we’re coming to the edge now, Push, literally the complete annihilation of the human race is knocking on our door.”

“You got it Michaels, remember when we first met? And I told you my whole reason for doing this?” Push replied, looking up at him and simultaneously jabbing at buttons in front of him at his panel.

“Sure I do, sure as hell I do, Push.” He replied, grabbing and squeezing his shoulder.

Push leant over the desk, grabbed at a wrinkled piece of paper and held it right up to Colonel Michael’s goggles, so he could see it through the Mist. “As long as they’re still around, you can be sure I’m going to be figuring out a way of whatever shitfest we get ourselves into, you can be damned sure I’m not going to give up.” He finished, placing the piece of paper back down.

The Colonel had already started to leave the room. “Four minutes Push, that’s all you’ve got, and we’re probably going to need to coordinate the whole of North America again. Jesus, we’ll get through this Push.” He nodded at him and left the room.

Chapter 8 – It has to be stopped

“Gentlemen, who do we have here?” The Colonel spoke as he entered the room.

“Mist evac,” Wiseman followed behind him, speaking to the room’s computer to pull the Mist out of the room. It shot out within seconds and they both sat down at their respective places.

“Colonel,” Push appeared on the screen at the end of the room as he had appeared five hours before during the previous transmission. “Listen, no one has answered their comms-streams yet, I’m going to keep trying.” He finished, jabbing away at his panel as he always did.

“What the hell do you mean no one has picked up? Not a single person!?” Michaels replied, sticking another cigar into his mouth and lighting it simultaneously.

“Nothing yet, I’m going through them again as we—”

“This is Chicago – Stream connected.” A voice interrupted, panting heavily, heaving in large breaths of air and swallowing spit. “SHIT!” the person shouted down the microphone their end of the comms-stream, now the sound of their breathing joined by the dull sound of flesh smashing against metal.

“Who is this, what the hell is going on there?!” The Colonel demanded of the other person.

More panting, and a scream in the background, followed by the sound of some light arms fire. “This is Major Richard Rexx, Goggle ident 54-67-80-F-E, security clearance level Alpha-Eight.” The voice finally spoke. “Listen, we’re in trouble, we’ve been trying to get through to you but our comms have been taken out again by an unknown enemy, we don’t know what the fuck is going on down here. We started getting reports that everything that was dead was starting to come back to life. We instigated a level 1 lockdown on our base,

but then the dead bodies in the morgue started fucking coming back to life, then one attacked the guards stationed on the door, and he died, then came back to life. Holy fuck, they're trying to get in here, what the fuck is going on?!" The Major screamed.

"Shit, Major, are you in touch with anyone else on the base, what about your Tokyo Collider unit?!" Michaels screamed back at him, again, puffing down hard on his cigar and blowing the smoke in the face of Wiseman, sat across from him in the small room.

"Look, we don't know what's going on, everyone has lost it, literally, these things started appearing everywhere, all at the same time, are numbers were depleted as it was, and now the whole base is fucked. The fucking general got eaten alive! I saw it with my own eyes Micheals, this undead mother fucker, cracked his head open like an egg and scooped out his fucking brains before stuffing them in his mou...Jesus, what was that?" More smashing of flesh on metal rattled through the comms-stream. "We secured ourselves and stationed the Tokyo Collider unit and what was left of the super soldiers outside the base, but as soon as the ones in the morgue started coming back, well everything started falling apart. I don't know Michaels! I just don't know! There sounds like a fucking horde of beasts out there, I don't know how long we can hold out. Look once we're gone, I don't know...else you...contact...once this room...gone, that's it..." the comms-stream broke up as the sound of guns firing picked up, multiple semi-automatic pistols launching their hot lead at the door that came crashing down.

"Jesus wept," The Colonel voiced as everyone else remained silent and the stream continued. The groaning sound they had heard before crawled through the room, and through their speakers. Wiseman physically shuddered as the women in the rooms screamed and the sound dull thuds of small arms rounds penetrating soft flesh came shooting through. The sounds of men roaring and tackling the beasts that entered into the room slowly, the gowning getting louder and louder as more and more seemed to filter in

through the little entrance they had created.

“Switch the fucking thing off, Push!” Michaels demanded. Push leaning forward still trying the other comms-streams with no luck. He terminated the stream, now entirely taken over by screams of people, the ripping of flesh and the cracking of bones.

“Put me through to Ruffshot, Push, immediate comms-stream and don’t stop trying the other bases, fuck. This is fucked.” Michaels turned from his seat, standing and puffing on his cigar.

“Ruffshot here! Colonel! You should see this shit!” Ruffshot answered the comms-stream co.

“Push, patch through his comms-stream to this screen now,” He responded, walking over to the screen at the end of the room, Wiseman standing up behind him and following him.

“Look!” Ruffshot shouted as he hit Huston Street running at a considerable pace. Shifting his head from side-to-side, revealing the carnage that was taking place all around them, he turned backwards for a split second revealing what looked like a sizable number of troops. “If you’re going to do your emergency city wide broadcast, best doing it now, everything seems to have gone fully fucking insane, Colonel.” He spoke, panting and running, his gun raised high and aiming at what he was running past, but not actually firing at anything, as he had been advised.

They watched through his eyes, curious in the room, “Jesus, look at that, the Vampiric Threat we missed, they must have gone into hiding or something, they’re coming out and attacking the zombies. Fuck me, they’re doing our job for us.” The Colonel stood-right up to the screen, watching as Ruffshot run down the centre of the street. Quickly shifting his head from side-to-side showing the Vampiric Threat diving out of the sky onto the dead humans that were reanimating around them. Barely visible through the

red-mist, he was right, Michaels thought, this is insanity, the living dead attacking each other, one for their blood, the other for what seems to be their brains, and we're stuck in the fucking middle, how the fuck are we going to get out of this one, he chewed contemplatively on his cigar for a split second. "Push, your advice seems to have worked, leave them alone and they leave us alone, at least for the minute anyway. Any further luck with the comms-streams?" he asked.

"Nothing yet Colonel, no reply from anywhere." Push replied, slightly dismayed, "But that doesn't mean they're all dead, we weren't able to get through to them before, when the Vampiric Threat first rained down. They can't possibly all be in the trouble Chicago has gone through—"

"You're right, there's still a modicum of hope. Right open up the emergency broadcast-stream, city wide, we need to let everyone know what's going on. Get ready to talk, you've had way more than four minutes, I want your ideas and I want them now, and I don't want them to add more fear into the hearts of the people we're tasked with protecting" He replied with a sombre tone, still looking at the stream that was coming from Ruffshots Goggles.

"Got you...Let her rip," Push said seconds later.

"Everyone, this is Colonel Michael Manns speaking from the Mist Production HQ at Ground Zero. This is an emergency broadcast-stream, city wide. It seems we've encountered yet a further abnormality in trying to combat the vampiric threat. Some of you may have encountered, what we are now dubbing the Zombie Threat, already. The civilians amongst us will hopefully not have experienced this yet and still remain secure in either the Mist HQ here, or in the Mist Apartments at Grand Central Terminus." He grabbed his cigar from between his teeth with his fore and middle fingers, breathing out quickly.

"Listen tight. I'm not going to beat around the bush. We are now up against a

number of unknown enemies, none of which comprise of humans. We have to stick closely together at this juncture. Soldiers and Marines, do not attack the enemy. Repeat do not attack the reanimated humans that you see in the form of the Zombie Threat, undisturbed they seem to leave you alone, they are currently concentrating on devouring any dead bodies that still litter our streets and the Vampiric threat that was missed are attacking them for their blood, an easy target for the horror.” He clamped his cigar back in between his teeth and turned to face Wiseman, who was stood, leaning on his chair at the table.

“Military personnel taking part in the clean up process, terminate your task immediately, those of you sweeping, again, terminate. Make your way back to the Mist HQ or Mist Apartments, which ever is closest and hold your ground. Protecting civilian lives is our foremost priority. Push Burrows, lead science adviser will now speak a few words to let us know what we’re dealing with here.” The colonel went back to watching Ruffshot’s stream

“Thank you, Colonel. My initial theories work as thus. The Mist has caused humans to mutate into beings with vampiric like qualities with an aggressive nature, wanting, needing blood to survive they attack who and what they can to sustain that need. We got this threat under control and provided those of us that were left with Mist filters to prevent or slow any further mutations.” Push stood in his now slightly damp and red lab coat, hand on the chin of his sweat-suit, thinking desperately, piecing things together, knowing the remaining population of New York City was listening. Already panicked, terrified, they needed comforting words, unfortunately, all Push could think of was terrible consequence after terrible consequence, each conclusion he resolved was bad for humanity, which ever way he looked at it. He’d have to skirt until he could discuss the severity of the situation with the Colonel.

“The thinned blood of the vampiric threat, after decomposition turns gaseous, the

mutated blood cells seem to be able to have bonded with the salicylic acid component of the Mist. This is what has caused the Mist to turn a blood red colour. The mixture of the Mist and the mutated blood of the Vampiric Threat seem to have caused some sort of total organic synthesis. The natural precursors of the Mist contents, combined with the initially mutated cells of the Vampiric Threat, cause this synthesis and the reanimation of dead bodies, which seem to have a need to consume brains, probably because of the high protein levels, which would help speed the organic synthesis. Now, that's a very early level analysis of the situation. But the reanimated people, or the Zombies, well, they currently seem preoccupied with feeding on the brains of the remaining corpses, or whatever they can get their hands on, but corpses will satisfy them for now. That's why my advice, and Colonel Michaels', orders maintain, that they should not be attacked directly. Military personnel, you should save your ammunition and civilians remain in doors at all times as currently directed. Colonel." Push finished.

"That' is all. We are re-coordinating nationally with other cities, sharing information and analysing our way out of this. Remain steadfast people, the marines and soldiers stationed where you are, are there to protect you, and that's what we shall do. All further updates will be fed through the usual channels of communication. Colonel Mann Michaels, out." Michaels pushed out two chimneys of smoke, one from each nostril as Push terminated the stream.

"Now that's out of the fucking way, Push, tell me where we really are and what the fuck we can do. I've got a hunch we can't just hide this one out whilst the vampires and zombies kill each other into extinction?" The colonel said, as fearsome as ever, he was at the brink of realisation, that what they were about to decide could be the very last monumental effort to secure the existence of the human race on their part of planet earth.

"You're right Michaels, there's a few eventualities, none of which spell good times

for us and the people we've got left. Look, this is my current train of thought, hybrids are a very real possibility at this point. The whole of the atmosphere has turned into some sort of horrific, gigantic melting pot of genetic waste and terror. Which ever way I look, which ever conclusion I come to, we're in trouble and with the military numbers we have left, even with Tokyo Collider, we're staring death in the face."

"Hybrids? Jesus, what are you thinking now?" The colonel replied, sitting back down with Wiseman.

"Well, the mutated vampiric threat currently feeding on the blood of the reanimated zombie threat, that could cause further mutations, and not pleasant ones. And the zombies that don't get attacked by vampires and bled dry? They seem to get stronger the more brains they eat? Right? Like I mentioned, the brain is extremely rich in protein, for their organic synthesis to keep going, they need a constant supply or they'll simply drop back dead again, but I don't think we can wait that long. Once the corpses have dried up, they're going to go after us, and by that time they're going to be strong. Strong enough to break through walls and doors like we heard happening in Chicago, and probably strong enough to destroy the vampiric threat. But we know we can kill the vampires, a lot easier than we can kill these fucking Zombie things. Look, we're running out of options, I can only think of one thing we can reasonably do..." Push finished, confusion and fear in his voice.

"...I think I know where you're going with this Burrows," Wiseman spoke up.

"Arh, she speaks, well, thanks for offering your thoughts with us finally Wiseman, what the hell have you got to say?" Michaels said, as hot headed as ever.

"Correct me if I'm wrong Burrows, but you're going to recommend going after Shattock, to try and find his remote negotiations outpost. To see if he's made any progress with his theories on negotiating with the Ghost Threat, they're our only hope. Am I right?" Wiseman raised his eyebrows above the line of his round glasses, wrinkling his forehead.

“Unfortunately, Wiseman, you’re absolutely right.” Push replied. “Christ, I hate to admit it Colonel, but listen, hear me out—”

“You’ve got my attention Push, you always do.” The Colonel reassured Push.

“Shattock is a kook right? He’s been discredited so many times no one with any serious scientific credibility wants anything to do with him. He lost the ability to be listened to by anyone soon after the Mist came down. His papers were torn apart by GIA soon after he finished his work with the Saint Albert Collaboratory Science and Military Program. He’s the best ectoplasmatic scientist there is though. He built a following right? A small band of other scientists who listened to his theories on potential negotiation with the Ghost threat, and they disappeared. Some ‘Sympathisers’ causing trouble in the cities every now and again, but they could never prove concrete associations with the real core that Shattock had grouped and disappeared with.”

“What’s your point, Push?” The Colonel asked him, having switched off Ruffshots stream he was back to watching his old friend, in his red lab coat, the other side of the Mist HQ.

“Right, well, Shattock gets in touch with me every now and again, we worked closely at SACSAMP, I never liked him but, he felt I would listen to him. I get communications sporadically, relaying his theories, and such. Look, what I’m getting at.” He came close to the camera that fed the stream through to the room, his sweat-suit mask large on the screen in front of the Colonel and Wiseman.

“Our numbers are too low to mount a counter attack against the zombies that are growing rapidly, and the vampiric threat that are still crawling out of all the nooks and crannies we missed. We can’t fight them and win, but we’re not going to sit back and die either. The ghosts are our only hope, if Shattock’s work has any merit, there’s a chance, no matter how small, that we can negotiate something here, at our lowest hour, to get the

Ghosts to take out the zombies and the vampires, giving us a chance at survival. Michaels, I know you say you trust my opinion, but I don't even trust myself on this one but there's not a whole lot else we can do."

"Jesus, Push, that's some idea, look, just say, what do you suggest we do?"

Michaels replied, needing to know the full extent of Push's idea before dismissing it entirely, or accepting it as the only inevitable course of action.

Push backed away from the screen, he played with the keys on his forearm and initiated another interjection of amphetamines. He clenched, bending upwards and backwards, clenching his fists. "Argh!" he bent forward, before standing back up straight "How the hell you get used to that I don't know. Right. Michaels, this is the only cause of action I can see any reasonable level of survival in? We take the Bubble-ship, we take Tokyo Collider, the dirty dogs and minimal crew, we need as many on the ground here to protect the civilians that are left, we have no idea how long the remaining dead will hold out for the reanimated corpses, they're growing exponentially. Anyway, we take the ship and go into the badlands, find Shattock and figure our a way out of this, the chances of success are minimal, but higher than anything we've got just by sitting here waiting for the inevitable. We find the bastard, we raid his research and we employ whatever means necessary to get the Ghost Threat on board. We prepare ourselves to turn off the Mist production, and if it works, they'll come down and kill everything that's trying to kill us." Push finished, breathing heavily and grinding his teeth from the injection of amphetamines.

"Okay, and what's plan B?" the Colonel asked, not really expecting a reply.

"Well, there's no plan B Michaels, we either make this work, or we're stuck in the badlands, as the city gets chewed apart, and we're gradually wiped from the face of the earth. That's about the long and short of it."

"Wiseman what do you think?"

“I think we’re fucked,” he stood up, slapping down his little stubby hands on his bald head, almost knocking off his round glasses. “But we have no other choice, Push is right, everything he said. We have to do it, and I have to come with you.” He finished, almost squaring up to the much larger and imposing Colonel.

“What the fuck do you mean you *have* to come with us?” the Colonel looked down on him, eyeballing him and breathing heavily.

“I think I’ve got some information that might just get us out of this mess. There’s a lot of things I know neither of you have ever been privy too, Jesus, until 24 hours ago you didn’t even know the Tokyo Collider project existed, can you imagine what else I know you, you, drones don’t?”

Michaels ground his teeth hard and snarled at Wiseman.

“Calm down Michaels, he’s just trying to get a rise out of you. Look what do you know Wiseman?” Push interjected via the comms-stream, trying to calm his warrior friend down and coax some information out of the slime ball in front of him.

“I’m just going to beat it out of him, Push, just watch me, I’ll get what we need out of him, I’ve done it before on people I liked a whole lot more than this little bastard.” He replied stepping forward, stretching out his fingers inside his sweat-suit gloves, pulling the material taught over his knuckles.

“Let it go, Colonel! We might need him!” Push continued to try and calm down his companion.

“Fucking miserable...” Michaels turned away from Wiseman, puffing on his cigar and punched the steel wall hard. It reverberated with the force and sent flecks of condensed blood that stuck to it into the air. “Right, let’s get this fucking show on the road,” he turned back around, completely composed, the professional marine until the end.

“Patch me though to Ruffshot, now. Wiseman, get back to your beast, I need you and it

prepped and ready for extraction in 15 minutes. Can you handle that?"

"I'm already out of the door." He replied walking away, pulling his hood up before exiting the Mist free, secured room.

"Ruffshot, Colonel Michaels, where are you?" The colonel turned to the screen to see what the Ruffshot's goggle stream had in order for him now.

"We're coming up on Mist HQ now, Colonel, we're just on West Broadway and Park, we've got sight of the patrols now." Ruffshot panted through the comms-stream, running at a slightly reduced pace than he was 15 minutes ago.

"Excellent Corporal, what sort of numbers are you carrying with you?" Michael's replied, stubbing another cigar on the floor of the secure room and pulling his hood up.

"We've got about a platoons worth of marines and soldiers. We've been taking hits, the fucking vampires! Shit!" He rolled forward on the floor as a pool of blood and guts exploded above his head, drenching him in and making him slip backwards slightly as he tried to stand. "Fuck! Good shooting, Foster!" He replied to his specialist who had shot an impending Vampire out of the air with his high velocity sniper rifle.

Ruffshot carried on running, a few of the men that were also in the group overtaking him. "Look at this shit! Colonel, they're changing, the ones that have fed on the fucking Zombies, they don't explode into gas any more, their blood is getting thicker. Just look at this shit," he lifted an arm that was covered in the thick goeey blood that had just splashed down on him, just about visible through the red Mist.

"Fuck, Push, what the hell is that? Are these hybrid things coming, or whatever... turning, already, what the hell?" The colonel asked as he walked out of the room, Ruffshot's stream patched through to his goggles, floating in a small screen in the top right-hand corner of his display, as he made his way to the Bubble-Ship hangar.

"Looks like it Michaels, we need to get under way as soon as possible. If they're

changing already the accelerated mutations could bring about a wide range of horrible and messed up things, god knows what's coming next. We need to get the HQ and Grand Central apartments barricaded and secured, and then we need to find Shattock."

"Affirmative. Ruffshot, you and the dirty dogs are on special assignment with me, Burrows, Wiseman and the Tokyo Collider. Stop messing around and get your asses to the Bubble-Ship hangar, we'll brief you when we're underway. Liftoff is as soon as you make it back." The colonel finished as he entered the sub-terra hangar which currently housed the Bubble-Ship and a few personnel.

They stood to attention as he marched into the expansive chamber, drawn out by his Goggles in the near distance, huge and empty, they should be able to get wherever the fuck they're mean to be going to fairly quickly, he thought.

"Captain Alza, we're taking off immediately, I'll let you know your destination momentarily. I trust you're fuelled, prepped and ready for immediate take off?" He walked passed them to the lowered loading bay ramp and stood for a second as the flight crew stood up from the boxes of supplies and ammunition they were sat on and ran over, saluting as the tips of their fingers pinged with colour.

"Absolutely, Colonel, ready as always," Alza replied attentively as his crew lined up beside him, at the foot of the loading ramp.

"Excellent, we're on a mission of the uppermost importance. I need you on top form Alza, here come the rest of our party now." Michaels pointed at the large hangar doors as Tokyo Collider came walking down them. Unable to move through the Mist HQ complex because of his size, he remained in a temporary lab in the main entrance of the HQ with the biggest doors, able to move outside and round, through the launch ramp of the sub terra hangar to get to the ship.

His gigantic frame drawn out by the Goggles of the Colonel, Alza and his flight crew,

they felt his powerful steps through the reinforced concrete floor. Wiseman's small eyes floating beside him, barely up to his knees, the small man, you could almost see his peculiar waddle just by the way his floating orbs jumped randomly in the Mist.

Tokyo walked up to the Colonel and saluted him with his free left arm. His three fingers also pulsing with the red, white and blue colours, though the rings of light looked as thick as a normal mans arms rather than fingers.

"A pleasure to be serving with you Colonel, I hope we achieve our mission objectives, I believe we will be briefed whilst en-route?" He looked down at Colonel Michaels, his huge goggle eyes glowing in Michaels display.

"Correct Tokyo, on board, get yourself loaded and ready to role, you're largely here for our immediate protection, possible enforcement if necessary." Michaels replied, attempting to stare right back at the huge beast.

"Affirmative." He stepped away slowly with gigantic steps, his huge feet rattling on the loading ramp of the ships bay.

"Jesus, that thing creeps me out," Alza said through a direct comms stream to the Colonel.

"You just worry about your ship, Captain, let's get this show on the road, here come the rest of our attachment, the Ghost-Team and Push." He pointed over to the other side of the hangar bay as Push walked through the elevator lift that had brought him from his laboratory and Ruffshot and his men ran through a set of doors to the right of it.

"Sorry it took me longer than expected, Michaels," Push crackled through a comms stream as he walked up to the ship, still at least a hundred yards from him. "I just needed to say goodbye to Lilly and Elizabeth."

"I understand Push. Jesus, I'd almost forgotten about your family, I hope you took the liberty of assigning a team to your office?" The colonel replied, watching him walk up

and the dirty dogs squad come running behind him.

“I did, they’re reinforcing my office as we speak. Lilly and Elizabeth, well, they’ll be a little better off than the majority, Christ, I feel bad for even saying it. Anyway, they have rations for a week, and I’ve given some super soldiers orders to really secure the room. Jesus, should the worst happen, they can hold out for a little bit. What have things come to Michaels? I left her your old revolver and a few live rounds, you know, just in case? Fuck. Should I have done that? I don’t know.” He dipped his head slightly, almost embarrassed. “Elizabeth always holds herself together so well, Christ, this is what it’s come to now? A young pregnant woman and her daughter left to fend for themselves against zombies and vampires and ghosts, and their only choice, after being stuck in a room for a week, if they don’t get eaten to death before hand, is to shoot themselves?” Push walked straight up to the Colonel who put his arms up on his shoulders.

“Not on my watch. Listen, Push, if there’s anyone who can figure this out, it’s you. One objective,” he lifted his hands off his shoulders and pointed his index finger at the ceiling. “Burrows. We’re not here to save the human race, we’re here to save your family, if the beauty you’ve brought together can’t survive this mess, then there’s little point any of us surviving, especially dog-eared fuckers like me. We’re going to do it, Push, we’ve got to.” Michaels spoke softly and uncharacteristically, showing some emotion, other than anger, for a split second before Ruffshot ran up to them.

“Reporting for duty, Colonel!” He panted through their comms-link.

“Outstanding Ruffshot, we get out of this thing alive, I might just recommend you for a medal,” the Colonel replied quickly, returning to his normal tone as he turned and walked up the loading bay of the ship.

Chapter 9 – It all becomes clear

“Alza, get me a comms-stream with Captain Bear Rodgers immediately!” Michaels crackled with a shout through to the ships cockpit.

“Right away, Sir,” Alza answered, his hands trying to manipulate the controls of the ship, heading outside of the cities protective Mist layer, somewhere toward the centre of northern America.

Almost entirely self governed, the Bubble-ship was a precarious beast, Alza’s time during flight being mainly occupied by maintaining the constant field of mist around it rather than actually piloting. The bubble that housed the ship and its protective shroud wasn’t a seal, or a bubble in the traditional sense. More of a mesh, it is comprised of and held to the hull by genetically engineered and grown super strength webbing. Light as a feather, but incredibly strong, almost completely transparent and easy to manipulate, it did everything they needed to help protect them during flight.

Air flowed around it nicely, and the Mist particles were too big to escape, if it was torn it could be quickly mended, it was a good solution to the problem they faced as they jetted along, low lying, around 3000 feet. There was little need to go any higher unless they came across a mountain, there wasn’t any other air traffic any more. Alza’s hands in custom fit gloves on at either side of his pilots chair, each one of his fingers controlling a number of tethers that held their bubble to the ship and contained their protective shroud.

“Rodgers here! Sir!” the battalion captain shouted through the established comms-stream from the battlefield that was Manhattan, a hail of gun fire and screams in the background.

“Captain, as you may have noticed, Tokyo Collider, myself and a small attachment have left the Mist HQ. We’re on a high priority mission which, with any luck, will help us

sort out this fucking mess.”

“Excellent, Sir. We’re taking heavy casualties here, both at the Mist HQ and the Grand Central Mist Apps. We’ve established rotary gunners, who are doing a good job in tearing apart the Zombie threat, however, they are attacking, unprovoked, we’re not moving first in the fight, as ordered.”

“Shit. Push, did you hear that?” The Colonel spoke, opening up a stream to Burrows as he did, also knowing that there wasn’t any way Push could have heard the previous communiqué.

“No, Micheals, what’s the problem?” Push answered instantly.

“Captain, tell Push what you just told me.” Michaels ordered.

“We’re experiencing considerable amounts of hostiles, Burrows. The Zombie threat is attacking, well, doing their best, without provocation. We’ve established rotary gunners who are tearing them up, but, well, they just keep coming. Started one at a time, now we’re getting dozens of them in packs moving slowly toward the base. Is this a point of concern?” Rodgers relayed the situation back to Push.

“Yes, well, this is the build. Everyone and everything that died in New York and wasn’t already burnt or torn to bits with bullets, well, expect them to be knocking on your door, increasing by the hour in terms of numbers.” Push replied, rubbing the back of his head and wishing there was some sort of sensory feedback through the sweat suit hood.

“Listen, these reanimated bodies, they seem to be impervious to pain and injury, the essential drive for the protein rich brain of active humans looks like their only drive. Take a point one micro tonne tactical nuke and blow a crater on West Street and get tell your rotary gunners to immobilise the enemy, rather than trying to kill. Push them into the hole, just keep them piling up, there’s little point wasting your ammunition on trying to kill, they’ll keep coming and coming, just take out their legs and drive them into the crater you’ll

make.” He finished, not feeling any more confident about the situation after his small plan, still cautious about how long they could possibly hold out.

“Understood, Burrows. Colonel, anything else?” The captain replied, his voice still crackling through the heavy gun fire in the background, groans creeping through intermittently.

“Just hold your shit together Bear, we’ll be back soon, and I want something to come back to, you got me?” The colonel growled through the stream.

“Affirmative,” he replied, killing the stream as the stomp of his boots and the shout of random orders crackled through.

“Push, I need to know where we’re going, right fucking now, we’re flying blind in with minimal protection, if we’re going to be even the slightest bit successful we need to a destination, and now” The colonel said through the comms-stream, walking up to Push in gigantic loading bay of the bubble-ship, eerily empty now, full of Mist but lacking the chaos that had filled out the expanse on previous trips.

“Wiseman,” Push replied, walking passed Ruffshot and his men preoccupied with arming themselves with as much weaponry they could possibly carry. “This is where you come in, I know you have coordinates for Shattock’s location, you need to hand them over now.”

“What the hell do you mean?” He replied, squaring up to Push, who though shorter than the Colonel, still carried a few inches over Wiseman’s stubby body. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.” He folded his arms.

“Listen, this isn’t the time for bullshit Wiseman, I know you have them because Shattock, as much as I never gave a shit, continued to send me minor updates on what he was doing, and to try and kill any connection that the media was making between him and the so called ‘Sympathisers,’ and you know what he also said? He said he was being

monitored, and it was by the GIA. Now, at the time I passed it off as paranoid delusions, but with the shit you keep professing to know, I'm inclined to believe him. Isn't your insider knowledge the whole reason you're here?" Push finished, giving an invisible hand gesture through the Mist.

"Well, what, erm, yes," Wiseman stalled for a second, "Right, well," coughing.

"Fuck you, Wiseman! Tell us what we need to know or I'm throwing you out of this loading bay right, fucking, now." The colonel walked over to Wiseman and grabbed his shoulder.

Tokyo Collider turned and pushed a heavy breath through their collective comms-stream.

"What the fuck is this, you've fucking got some sort of body guard you, little bastard? Fuck you, beast!" The colonel pointed over Wisemans shoulder at Tokyo Collider, snarling right back at him. "I've shat meaner looking things than you," The dirty dogs ran up behind their colonel, slamming cartridges in into their guns and locking their targets.

"Christ, will everyone just take a breath!" Push interjected as the friction grew in the moment. "Wiseman, give me the coordinates, right now." He continued to stand right in front of him, in the middle of the heated instant.

"He's just outside Montrose, Colorado," he replied with a tone of arrogance. Hitting the keypad on his forearm he passed through the exact longitude and latitude of where he had come to learn Shattock those to hide out, with his small group of fellow scientists.

"Fuck," Michaels replied. "You've got some weird complex about being wanted haven't you? Fucking pathetic, you better be telling the truth," he turned away from Wiseman, facing the dirty dogs who stood down at the same time. "Alza, you get those?"

"Affirmative," he replied.

“Good, get on it, what can this thing do, how quickly can we get there?”

“I’m just pulling up the numbers now, we’re almost 1800 miles away from our heading. With an empty cargo bay and this minimal load, we’re easily capable of hypersonic. We’re talking Mach 7 here Colonel, pushing it, 4000 mile an hour. I can probably get us there in about 30 minutes.” He finished, sounding proud of his ship.

“Excellent, do it, hit the button.” The colonel replied.

“Strap yourselves in, we’ll be there in no time.” Alza replied with a weirdly serious tone.

Ruffshot followed the Colonel over to the wall where they began pulling tethers and straps away from the wall, over their bodies and clicking themselves in. “Colonel, permission to speak freely?” he asked with a sombre tone,

“Granted.” Michaels replied through a direct comms-stream including the rest of the dirty dogs team as well as Push.

“Just what the hell is going on here, what the fuck was that all about? When you say Shattock, you mean David Shattock, right? What the hell are we doing going after him? Sir, we need to be back in the fight. Just what’s going on, sir?” he finished, clicking down a hard line piece of material over his chest.

“Ruffshot, you’re right, we’re going after him, and I’ll give you a reason and the rest of your men, it’s about time we filled you in. We’re going after him to try and save the human race. I never thought I’d say this, it’s not something I want to admit to, breaks my god damned heart to even utter the words, but, the fight is lost. We’re simply looking at prolonging the inevitable. Listen, Burrows has an idea, and I trust him, which means you also trust him. Get yourself ready for hypersonic speeds.”

“Affirmative, Sir. That’s all any of us needed to know. We’ve got your back, no matter what.”

The ship swooped in and over the tiny outpost in the middle of what was once the Black Canyon National park, south Colorado. It hovered over a flattened part of the mountainous region, its retro-busters stabilising it and lowering it slowly, pushing up the snow and loose rock.

“We’re here, Colonel” Alza said through their comms stream.

“Excellent work, Captain,” Michaels replied coming back around and un-strapping himself from the wall harness usually utilized to fix down ammunitions and supplies for in the field. Their hypersonic travel was generally only considered safe when it was only the flight crew on board. An emergency speed enabling the huge transport ship to travel coast to coast in an hour or less, the flight crew sealed in their cockpit. Their specialised sweat-suits would pressurise themselves appropriately, making sure the blood of its inhabitants head wasn’t pushed to the back of the brain, causing black out, which at 4000mph, could cause some serious problems. A few seconds of unconsciousness and the ship would disintegrate upon impact with a mountain or body of water or whatever got in it’s way first. Michaels and the others had drifted out 10 minutes into the ride, but no permanent damage was done.

“This is as close as I could get us, Colonel. We’re 2 clicks away from the coordinates Wiseman handed over. It’s some tricky terrain I tell you. We’re currently perched on a quarter as it is, I recommend disembark as quickly as you can. I can’t stay here though, I’m going to have to move six clicks away and down this mountain to more stable ground. I’ll have a permanent comms-stream open though, available for you to connect whenever you require.” Alza said as the rest of the small group detached themselves and started moving toward the lowering bay doors.

“Understood Captain, good work, unfortunately we have no ETA on our return, I’ll

keep you posted, we're not looking at more than 24 hours at the most. He turned to his men who had lined up neatly, Push standing at their side. Tokyo Collider's monumental footsteps came up behind them, now loaded with a full compliment of ammunition, the barrels of the massive Vulcan cannon spinning in bursts, as if they were twitching with anticipation, wanting to fire, wanting to kill again.

"Ready for a hike men?!" He shouted at them.

"Sir, yes, sir."

"Outstanding. Listen, we've got two clicks to cover over rough terrain. I'm talking mountains with long and steep drops. This is not your usual city hike over paved streets. We're also looking at no Mist cover, although the likelihood of us coming across Ghost Threat around here is minimal, there's still a chance. As you well know, they tend to stick to populated areas, where they can best pick us off for food, and we're a long way away from any dense pockets of population, at least any enough to garner any interest for from them. However..." he stopped pacing. "Specialist Foster, I expect you to carry a Mist canister gun, just in case we see any incoming and you have to lay down a mist tunnel for us before we reach Shattock's bunker. Now, take a dose of amphetamines and stay alert." He finished as he turned and made his way down the ramp, punching his arms keypad, ordering up a strong batch of Speed to get him going.

They followed him down and built to a light jog. Through the shroud of the ship and out of the momentary hole in the bubble Captain Alza had created, they hit the hard rock side of the mountain and paused in awe for a second as they were greeted a fresh sunrise.

"Jesus, will you look at that," Push said, removing his sweat-suit hood and taking a deep breath. "Little point in us keeping our hoods up here." he breathed out. "Wow, will you smell that fresh air, I've not smelt air like that in years. Christ, I'd almost forgot the beauty nature can bring us." He turned and flashed a momentary smile at Michaels who

revealed his course but handsome features as he pulled his hood off and threw a cigar into his mouth, the ship taking off behind him.

“That is good,” he replied, lighting a cigar, clearly unable to smell anything other than the thick tobacco leaves, “Hell, gives us a reason for doing what we’re doing I guess, if we can find a way out of this fucking mess, we might be able to appreciate a sight like that without thinking of the abhorrent terror that’s taking place back in our cities.” He said walking passed Push blowing out a small cloud of smoke as he starting along the Cliffside they had come on to. “Like I said, eyes peeled men, there’s not likely any threat around here, but we don’t want to have come all this way and get killed before we get to Shattocks base. Move out!”

They all started running in their little pack, Kwalski out in front with a global positioning device guiding them to the coordinates Wiseman had given them. Within minutes the path they were following had become too narrow to jog in anything more than single file. Tokyo Collider struggling, shifting sideways along the narrow edge and using his gigantic hand to grip onto the rock face.

“Where the hell are we going? You sure you’re reading that thing right, Kwalski?” Ruffshot sounded off impatiently.

“I’m reading it right, Corporal. Look, just over there, that mound of rocks, that’s where we’re heading, that’s the exact coordinate Wiseman gave us,” he replied, pointing to the group of boulders that were a few hundred meters away, as the edge they were on opened up and levelled off. Getting closer all the time, some vegetation sprang out of cracks in the widening area.

“Wiseman, what the hell is this, where’s his base?” the colonel asked through the comms-stream, controlling his breath and checking his pulse.

“It’s not visible to the naked eye,” Wiseman wheezed, struggling to keep up with the

group's light jog. "We used deep earth reconnaissance, just happened across it by accident, coincidence, lucky for us we did." He stopped, bending over, leaning on his knees, looking up and licking the sweat off his top lip. "Look, before the mist came down, the old government sent up a network of satellites into orbit. They're equipped with high powered deionising lasers, they don't penetrate, or boil or anything your normal laser will do, but by measuring what bounces back, we can effectively see what's underground, kind of like a super-powerful, super efficient sonar. They were scanning the whole of the north continent, trying to look for more oil, gold and such, was going to take years. Working from the middle out, they kept sending data after the mist came down which we kept analysing on a semi-regular basis. We'd get hundreds, thousands of cave systems back, but Shattock was actually unfortunate enough to build his base over a large oil deposit, so we had a reason to come snooping. We sent out a team to have a look and keep an eye on things if necessary. They reported back to us about Shattock, but evidently, they were killed because soon after they landed we lost contact with them."

"So, what, Shattock killed them? Did you send any more people out?" The Colonel replied.

"No, well, it wasn't a high enough priority, we had no real need for the oil in the immediate future and like everyone else, we didn't take Shattock and his research seriously. We lost 10 men, there wasn't even any proof that he was responsible, they just stopped communicating, we put it down to Threat rather than him. We thought we'd leave him to it, we know where he is, if he causes any serious trouble, we'd tactically nuke him from orbit."

"No shit," Kwalski replied, surprised at the severity of the response as they pushed through some foliage and over a mound, getting closer to the rocks all the time.

"Colonel, I think you're going to want to take a look at this," Foster shouted over, a

few meters to their right. They all found it slightly strange as they turned to him and saw a young figure with short ginger hair and freckles rather than floating eyes and grey Mist. They jogged over as he knelt.

“Those men you lost, Wiseman, looks like they didn’t get very far.” He poked the almost entirely decomposed bodies with the butt of his gun. Rocking the hollow armour on the uneven stone surface.

“What the hell happened here?” Colonel asked, looking around at the scattered bodies, counting nine in total. “This group, there’s one missing, men, spread out and check their bodies.” He ordered, leaning over and looking at the Mist Gendarmerie at his feet.

He growled slightly as a tube of ash from his cigar fell on the body. “No injuries, nothing I can see anyway, they’ve been killed by Threat, men, what have you found?” He stood up looking around as the dirty dogs, Push and Wiseman with Tokyo stood sentry beside them.

“Nothing here. No sign of injury or struggle, at least from what I can tell. This guys magazine is still full,” Ruffshot replied, standing from his knees, pulling out the rusted cartridge from the machine gun that had rested in the withered grip of the body. The rest of the men quickly reached similar conclusions, shouting their results back to the Colonel.

“Shit, what the hell is this, what’s the likelihood of Threat being this far out? Randomly and at exactly the same time your men were sent out here, Wiseman? Out in the middle of the god damn wilderness, on top of a fucking mountain, hey? Practically zero, that’s what. I don’t like this. Move out! Kwalski, how far off are we?” he finished, walking passed Wiseman, blanking him, not giving him a second to answer.

“We’re just a hundred meters away Colonel,” he replied, pointing at his global positioning tool and looking in the right direction.

“Right, let’s get to it.” He replied setting off, back into the light jog, his men following,

the bounding strides of Tokyo Collider smashing down on the rock.

“What the hell was that about, Push?” the colonel said, turning to his old companion, not liking that he didn’t have the luxury of a private comms-stream now hoods were off.

“I don’t know Colonel, you’re right, the odds of any threat being out here are minimal. It could be coincidence, or I don’t know, something worse—”

“This is it, this is right on the spot,” Kwalski shouted over the rattle of armour, guns and the crunches of Tokyo Colliders stamping. “Look, rocks, just rocks, what the hell do we do now?” he turned to the group, looking confused and dismayed

“Hold that shit together, Kwalski,” Ruffshot said, moving over to the pile of boulders. “Look, it must be under here, some sort of entrance or something?” he finished, looking at the Colonel for back up or disapproval.

“You’re on the money, Ruffshot.” He nodded approvingly and turned. “Tokyo, you need to move some of these, there’s got to be something underneath here,” he finished, pointing at him and moving his arm around to point at the piled rock.

The beast moved over without response, and started at the task it had been ordered to do. Its gigantic free left hand with its power glove made a high-pitched whining sound, as if it were charging, and the fingers opened up like a massive grabbing claw. He knelt down, using the cannon on his right arm as a brace against the ground and grabbed at a boulder about the size of a motorbike, one at the bottom of the pile, his gigantic fingers trying to find some grip.

He strained for a second, pushing his fingers around and over the boulder. His massive head, visible to the men, pulled tight, his mouth revealing huge teeth like wooden chairs. They ground together making the most horrendous sound and, unleashing the full extent of all of his force, he started to stand. Pulling the huge rock free, out from

underneath the other boulders he stood back and watched the rest collapsed about the space on the ridge as the lynch-pin boulder was removed. He took a wobbly step back, correcting himself with his massive toes, his calves rippling with raw energy, before lifting the rock high and launching it over the side of the mountain.

The rest of the men came in close around the toppled pile and saw what looked like a small, sealed hatch underneath some loose rubble. A small window indicated there was no light behind it.

“Shit, looks like we’ve got our entrance, probably the end of the line for you though, hey, Tokyo?” Kwalski said, gently patting the huge beast’s calf.

“Excellent. Tokyo, pull the thing open.” The Colonel said, again pointing to reiterate his orders. The beast moved over, slowly lowering itself to its knees and clasped its enormous hand around the metal seal, a meter or so in diameter. It strained again, this time it looked physically challenged, its gigantic muscles pulsating through the material of its sweat suit, showing raw power where there wasn’t any armour. It breathed heavily and let out a heaving groan before the seal ripped open, like the lid off a tin, its arm flaying backwards as it gave way, pulling up concrete reinforced with iron pins, rubble flying all over the men. They dived to the ground as chunks came raining down, trying desperately to avoid injury, covering their heads as they did.

“It’s open, Colonel,” the beast said, standing back to its feet, its entire bulk steaming in the cold mountain air.

They stood and walked over, brushing off the cement dust and coughing.

“I can see that,” the colonel nodded. “Ruffshot, your team goes first, don’t kill anyone or anything, we’re here for negotiation purposes, we need to know what he knows, if he’s even down there. Shit, he could be dead already for all we know and the welcoming we’ve had here. Just be cautious. Feel free to use your hoods, they’ll probably help you

out in the low light down there.”

“Affirmative.” Ruffshot said as he walked over to the hole in the ground, kicking a small rock into it and waiting for the sound of it hitting the bottom. A few seconds passed before a sound came echoing back up.

“Seems deep, men, side arms as we enter, shoulder your rifles, I’ll go first, if I give the word, get moving back up as fast as you fucking can.” He said as he started down the hole, Kwalski offering some support, lowering him onto the metal pin steps that were bolted into the wall of the vertical tunnel. “Shit, look at this, it’s going to be a squeeze, Colonel, I’ll radio up once I’ve reached the bottom and made sure it’s clear.”

“Affirmative, Ruffshot.” He said, as he lost sight off his Corporals head, the rest of the dirty dogs following him down one by one, their guns and armour rattling against the concrete walls surrounding them.

“Wiseman, what do you think?” the colonel turned to the short man, standing with his hands on his hips.

“Looks to me he’s dead, or gone, one of the two. I wouldn’t expect too much security out here, but if like Push said, he knew we were after him, then, well, I don’t think we’d have such an easy task.” He finished, turning to him as Tokyo Collider came up behind him again.

“For once I think you’re right, I don’t like this at all, too fucking easy, Push, what was the stuff you got through from him about, what did it indicate?” He asked.

“Well, not a whole lot, it was barely incomprehensible, I ran it through numerous encryption keys to see if he had encoded it, but nothing, no encoding, just gibberish 90% of the time. His last one said something about liberating a ‘red faced man,’ I didn’t know what it meant though so I half dismissed it. I mean, Christ knows what he was going on about, you know how he was always on the eccentric side. His science was bad at the best

of times,” he finished, looking over at Wiseman who looked as if he was very uncomfortable in his sweat-suit for a second.

“What the hell’s the matter with you, Wiseman?” the colonel stood up close to him, looking down.

“Nothing!” he jolted. “Look, it’s high up here, I get vertigo, I’m just not comfortable up here okay? We should get going, I’m going down now,” He replied, still squirming.

“You’ll go when Ruffshot give the all clear, Wiseman, what are you hiding?” he pulled in, even closer and eyeballed him hard, breathing his thick smoke breath down on him.

“Colonel, we’re at the bottom, initial sweeps indicate we’re clear and good to move in, in fact, there doesn’t seem to be a whole lot of anything down here.” Ruffshot sounded through the speaker in the colonels lowered hood.

“Wait, I’m picking up a very weak life signal, about a hundred and fifty meters into the complex. Fuck! It’s gone again, I got a bearing on it, though. There’s something alive in here, might be a fucking cat for all we know, but—”

The colonel interrupted Kwalski, “We’re moving down immediately, Ruffshot, stick where you are, keep a close eye on that life signal, we’ll be down there in a second.” He replied, before grabbing the scruff of Wisemans sweat suit. “We’re not done yet, Wiseman,” he pushed him out of his way, “And you, you stay here,” he looked up at Tokyo Collider whilst pointing to the floor. “You’re on sentry duty, we’ll be contactable the entire time, any weird shit, you let us know, immediately. You got it?” He chewed the end of his cigar still staring at him hard.

“Affirmative, Colonel.” He rumbled back, low and ominous as ever.

“Right, Push, you first, Wiseman, I’ll follow you down.” He said, Push moving over to the hole and lowering himself in gently, a fidgety Wiseman following, the Colonel taking a

quick look around the beautiful landscape, flicking his cigar butt over the edge of the ridge, this better fucking work, he thought as he climbed into the shaft.

“Kwalski, any sign of whatever it was?” Ruffshot said, in the small opening at the bottom of the shaft as dust and small fragments fell from where the others were climbing down.

“Nothing yet, I’m increasing amplification, but I don’t want to crank it too high, we could start picking up things on the surface that’ll just get in the way. Fuck.” He looked up and caught a puff of concrete dust over his face, “God damn it.”

“Right, men, where are we?” the Colonel asked, the last of the group clambering down into the dank room. One small emergency, yellow light shone dimly, highlighting the vein like trickles of water that ran down the concrete walls.

“Here, Sir, though this herm-seal hatch there’s a corridor, probably 80 to 100 meters long, rooms going off it either side and another hatch at the end, same as the one Tokyo just pulled off above, but it’s been left open, and the drop is a quarter of what we have here. Down there you’ve got the same again, it’s like a tiered system or something. Three levels down we’re detecting a life sign, but no indication of what it is yet, this whole place is reinforced with concrete with iron mesh, it’s affecting what we can pick up.”

“Good work, Ruffshot, lets see what we have in some of these rooms. It’s looking likely now that Shattock is dead or gone, either way, if we can find some of his materials we might be able to piece together what he was up to down here and find an answer to our problem. Quick as you like, Corporal, we’re against the clock here.” Michaels replied.

“Right away, sir. Men, move up, eyes open, we’re going through each of these rooms, one at a time, by the numbers, I don’t want any surprises.” Ruffshot ordered his men as they moved through the herm-seal hatchway and into the corridor.

“Push, Wiseman, stay close, once the rooms are swept we’re looking for anything

valuable that might be able to help us out.” The colonel said, taking out his side arm and stepping through the seal after his men.

“On three...one...two...three! Move! Move!” Ruffshot shouted as Kwalski burst open the first hatch in the dark corridor. Foster and Davis streamed in, followed by their Corporal. They stepped quickly, machine guns aimed and fingers on triggers, they scanned the room with sharp movements, sweeping 180 degrees, absorbing what was around them, looking for any threat, ghost or human.

A bunk bed, a small desk with computer and monitor, a bedside lamp still on and glowing with soft blue light, it was a small and dank set of quarters, looked like it had been lived in recently as they kicked at the half eaten plates of food that barely looked a day old.

“Clear!” Foster shouted, turning and lowering his guard as Davis and Ruffshot did the same. They exited just as quickly as they had entered, running out and moving onto the next door the opposite side of the corridor as the Colonel, Wiseman and Push entered slowly.

“What’s the betting all the rooms along this corridor are exactly like this one?” the colonel asked, rubbing his tongue along his teeth.

“Christ, it stinks, look at this filth.” Wiseman kicked at the plate of food beside the bed and sent a tin cup rolling along the concrete floor.

“Looks like Shattock had a few of his ‘Sympathisers’ staying with him now, doesn’t it?” Push said, walking over to the computer and tapping at the keys. “This thing’s dead, I’m pretty sure we’re not going to find anything in here.” He turned, shrugging his shoulders as more shouts of “Clear!” Echoed through the corridor and into the room, Ruffshot and his men quickly working their way through the first level which seemed to be part of the bases living quarters.

“Well, whoever was here looks like they left in a rush and trashed anything that

could help us out at the same time,” the Colonel walked out of the room and across the corridor to the one opposite. “This one’s the same, bunk, half eaten food, smashed up computer. What the hell was he up to?”

“The level is clear sir! No sign of hostiles, or anything for that matter!” Ruffshot came running back up the corridor.

“Good work, Corporal. How many rooms have we got here, 40 on this level, all the same as this one Ruffshot?” he asked, stepping back out of the room and into the corridor.

“Well, we weren’t having a good look sir, just sweeping, but yeah, just standard living quarters,” he replied.

“If you can call them that,” Wiseman broke in with a disgusted look on his little face.

“Well, look, we’d have 80 people on this level, that’s a sizable number for a crazy bastard like Shattock, and could have perhaps attracted some Threat.” The colonel, said, walking down the corridor now, peering into the rooms to see the same dreary mess inside each. “Ruffshot, continue with your men, sweeping by the numbers, this level and the next, and keep an eye out for that life sign you spotted. Kwalski, where the hell are you, you there?” the colonel leant into his still lowered hood.

“Yeah, got you, Sir!” Kwalski shouted back through, “We’re just waiting on the Corporal before we move down.” He finished, the sound of the other two men talking, audible in the background.

“I’m on my way,” Ruffshot replied whilst running off, down the corridor.

“Now, Wiseman, where were we, feeling a little more comfortable down here, or are you worried now your body guard has gone?” the colonel walked up to Wiseman with a snarling and menacing look on his face.

Wiseman backed into a corner of one of the small rooms, beginning to look nervous again. “Look, doing something to me is completely counter productive, without me, you

won't be able to find out what you need to know will you?" he said, snivelling and breathing heavily.

The colonel stepped back, allowing some room between the two of them and began laughing into the ceiling. "So, you *are* hiding something you conniving little bastard!"

"I didn't say that, you'll just have to find out won't you?" he replied, a little more confident with the increased gap between their bodies.

"Fuck this," the colonel replied, grabbing his side-arm semi-automatic pistol, pulling it up and pushing the barrel against Wisemans forehead all in one swift motion.

"Michaels!" Push lunged at him, pulling his arm down and away from Wisemans face. "What the fuck do you think you're doing, you're going to execute him now?!" he shouted at his face. The Colonel stood motionless for a second, his eyes focusing and squinting, as if he was signalling Push.

Wiseman began clapping his hands, and let out a long sigh, "The old good cop, bad cop routine eh?" he shook his head. "You're pathetic, the pair of you, once we get sorted out, well, you're both going to be in a serious amount of trouble." He waddled down the corridor, away from the pair.

"Just leave it Colonel, we'll deal with him once we know what we need to. You trust me right? As fucked as things are, we still need him for the mean time. Just concentrate on getting the job done, we need to know what Shattock was up to here right?" Push whispered to the Colonel,

"Shit, Push, you're right, as usual," he holstered his side-arm and looking up at him, his guard dropping for a split second again, the tough squint turning into a soft cry for help, as if someone were trapped inside his hardcore exterior.

"Threat! Threat! Threat!" Ruffshot came screaming through the comms-stream. "Hoods up! Colonel! Get the hell out of here!" He roared as the sound of Mist Cannisters

bouncing off walls rattled through their comms-stream.

Wiseman came running back up the corridor, his podgy little figure struggling to raise his hood at the same time. Push took off, followed by the Colonel, both pulling their tiny protective layer over their heads, their displays clicking into action, drawing out the scene in front of them.

“Wait! Look, it’s, it’s behind a wall of mist, it’s trapped!” Kwalski shouted through the comms-stream as the three others started up the shaft they had just come down.

“Wait, what? What the hell!” The colonel replied angrily as Push and Wiseman continued up the shaft, grabbing onto one of the iron pin like rings, acting as vertical steps. “Status update! Immediately! Ruffshot, what the hell is going on down there, are we safe or should we continue with the evacuation?” he finished, half knowing the answer, if they weren’t safe, the likelihood was that they’d be dead already.

“Colonel, sorry, instinct kicked in. Kwalski’s right, as soon as we entered the room a mist bubble seems to have surrounded the threat, we’re safe, it’s housed and we’ve laid down anti-mist-oxidant that’s clearing up Fosters canisters as we speak.” He panted, slight panic still in his voice.

“I thought I’d fucking seen it all. Jesus—” Kwalski butted in.

“We’re on our way.” The colonel replied as they quickly jumped the last few steps down the shaft and sprinted toward the hole at the end of the corridor. Quickly they raced down the same iron like steps, the shaft just as narrow as the last but a lot shorter. Another small room at the bottom lit a dim and grimy yellow by the emergency light, another corridor the other side of a herm-seal-hatch with more open doors. The light blue emitted from the lamps in each room crept out into the corridor, highlighting the filth on the concrete floor. The walls wetter than before, tiny drops splashing in shallow puddles, they stamped through the corridor before almost jumping into the final hatch at the end of the

room. More steps before another room.

The Colonel jumped to the floor followed by Push, Wiseman missing the last rung on of the shaft and falling the last few feet. Cracking on the hard floor, panting, his small belly rising up and down, Michaels and Push left him where he landed as they pushed the ajar herm-seal-hatch fully open.

“Fuck, get in here!” Ruffshot turned to them, about 20 feet away, in the middle of a huge laboratory come surgical theatre room. The floor the same size as the previous two but a single, open plan room rather than 40 smaller rooms, a short 7ft ceiling again, still as damp, the smell just the same, yet black and white tiled floors rather than the rough concrete.

They walked in slowly, pulling their hoods back off, the boots of their sweat-suits clicking on the tiled floor which bore the reflections of the lamps that shone their blue light, like the rooms above. To their right in the distance, a large Perspex box that looked to be filled with Mist, Kwalski and Foster stood about 10 feet away from it, one with his canister gun hoisted, ready to fire, the other pacing to and fro.

The colonel brought back his focus as Push took a step past him. “Shit, what the hell have we got here?” He asked as he walked up to Ruffshot, now beginning to notice the contents of the room in their full glory, numerous operating tables. Stainless medical grade steel splattered with blood, chunks of flesh in wash basins. Like a massive 100meter squared operating theatre combined with weird experimental gear, jars of body parts, images and all other sort of paraphernalia. It reminded the Colonel of triage like medical huts he’d seen so many fallen soldiers taken into, never to leave again, but grosser, unnatural.

“It reminded me of the same thing, Colonel.” Ruffshot replied, walking away, instinctively knowing the Colonel’s thoughts. “Sir, Push, this is the point of concern, the life

form we picked up. Over here,” he walked toward what seemed to be more operating theatre, but after a few meters their reflections sprang in front of them. “Tricky, eh? We didn’t notice either until one of Foster’s mist canisters bounced off it. Gives you the illusion the room’s much bigger than it is, right, just wait ‘til you see what the hell is behind this thing. Davis, you there?” Ruffshot said, turning back away from them and pulling his rifle around, holding it in close to his chest, readying the fire position.

“All clear, Sir!” He shouted back, quite audible but still out of sight.

Their reflections getting closer all the time as they walked up to the mirrored wall. Ruffshot put his hands out, his gloves scraping along the surface before he reached a small indent and pushed with both. A door clicked open and he stepped half way through. Leaning back, outside and turning to face them. “A room within a room Colonel, some weird shit, looks like what we’ve got in here, well, looks like Shattock wanted to keep hidden, even from the people he was working with.” He finished, stepping through the hole.

“Push, looks like you’ve got your red-faced-man,” The colonel said as he walked into the room opening his eyes wide to absorb the horror that had presented itself.

“Jesus Christ, what is that thing?” Push followed him in and instantly saw what he meant. Walking passed he picked up a clipboard that had been left on a steel trolley at the side of the room, still full of medical instruments and still covered in blood. He walked around what was fixing their gaze, a single light source flickered in its direction.

A male looking figure, above average in size and build was lying on a large reclining chair in the middle of the room. Naked from head to toe his face was a bright red and shone momentarily in the irregular light, reflecting the source as if it had a film of plastic covering it.

“Shit, can we get a torch or something on this thing please?!” The colonel shouted, walking up to the body, it’s chest rolling up and down slowly, it’s eyes closed, pipes coming

out of the palms of its hands and bottom of its feet, wires protruding from its skull, all leading off to the side of the room to a large cylinder.

The height of the room and a number of meters in diameter, it received the pipes and wires, again a bright red, but with patches of rust and white lettering he had difficulty making out.

"It's labelled 'Ectoplasm two fourteen,' Sir" Davis said, noticing the Colonel look at the body and then follow the attachments off it to the cylinder.

"What the fuck is that supposed to mean, what the hell is this thing?!" He said, not understanding what was going on, as usual, the warrior out of the scientific loop. He needed his answers in black or white, he was there to either kill it, or protect it, in any circumstance he found himself in, that was what it eventually came down to. He needed to know what the hell he was supposed to do with this thing in front of him, and now.

"Jesus, you're right, a red-faced-man, just like he said," Push answered after a brief period of silence, walking up close to the body and lightly running his fingers over its face.

"Don't fucking touch it!" The colonel shouted, trying to pull Push back.

"Michaels, it's perfectly safe, look, this clipboard says it's kept heavily sedated at all times." He wriggled free of the colonel's loosened grip and walked back up to it. "Ruffshot, Davis, search this room, head to toe, gather all the paper and notes and everything you find, we need everything, this has got to have some significance." He said, looking in between the clipboard and the oversized, reddened thing on the table.

"Sir, I was just about to mention, we found this, it's still active." He handed Push the stream-panel that they had found on the way in and kept close to them, trying to avoid breakage or loss.

"Oh shit. It's true." Wiseman said peering through the mirrored door rubbing the back of his head. He hung for a second and caught the eyes of the Colonel before shifting

to Push, both looked uneasy and curious. He turned slowly and stepped away from the door before breaking into the best sprint his uneasy frame could manage, heading toward the herm-seal-door.

“Kwalski! Stop him!” The colonel shouted as Wiseman half waddled, half ran.

Kwalski turned, pacing after him and within seconds lunging for him, grabbed the hood on his sweat suit, pulling them both to the floor as he reached the herm-seal-hatch.

“Fucking sit still you little bastard.” Kwalski struggled, punching Wiseman in the face with a tenth of his strength.

He yelped and laid still, a trickle of blood poured from his lip as he panted rapidly trying to catch his breath.

“Bring him in here Kwalski. Foster, keep an eye on the Threat, any sign of trouble, full spread of canisters whilst we get the hell out of here.” The colonel said through his comms-stream to the soldiers. Both quickly retuning an affirmative answer.

“Get here you little bastard.” Michaels grabbed Wiseman by his collar as Kwalski pushed him through the opening into the mirrored room. “What the hell do you know about this thing, eh? What the fuck is this? This another one of your experiments? This another one of your abominations? What the hell are you up to here?” he shouted him to the ground.

“Colonel, we might not need him, this stream-panel contains a pre-recorded message,” Push replied walking over to them. He pulled in close to the Colonel and hit the play button. Shattocks face appeared, splattered with blood, wide eyes and wire like hair, more gaunt than how Push remembered him, but just as crazy looking. He adjusted the camera and moved back a few paces, his entire upper torso to come into view. He wore blood covered lab-coat, his hands twitched, opening and closing rapidly.

“If you’re viewing this, you’ve figured out I can probably help with what’s going on at

the moment,” he began, running his hands through his hair, flattening out its electrified appearance for a second before it sprang back up. “I, well, we, here at my complex, we’ve come to discover some serious things about what the hell is going on around here over the last few years. I’ve put this quick recording together because you might be able to still help out, there’s a chance now, with all that has happened, you’ll finally listen to me. Hey, are you there Push?” he paused for a second and produced a shaky wave. “I bet you are, I always liked you, I know you never really paid any attention to me, but well, you weren’t as mean as some of the others, hey,” he pushed out some air, attempting a light laugh, “Just as well for us, or we’d all be in a serious heap of trouble. Anyway, anyway, anyway,” he shook his head and attempted to flatten his hair out again.

“Look, I’m not going to beat around the bush, you’re not going to believe me, but it’s the truth, any moment you’re wondering how crazy I’ve gone, which you will, you just look up at that red-faced-man we managed to liberate. Just look at his size, that red film over his face, the wires and pipes that are keeping him alive, then look at what he’s projected in the next room, and then think about how insane this really is.”

“Fuck, fuck! Let me the fuck go!” Wiseman struggled under Kwalski’s grip desperately wriggling and trying to get away.

“You...little...squirmy...” Kwalski said with difficulty before he landed a heavy elbow between Wisemans shoulder blades, incapacitating him instantly.

“Kwlaski, stop messing around, get that little bastard under control.” Michael’s said to him with a light scowl.

He looked up and shook his head, “Sorry, sir!” before they all looked back down at the stream-panel in Push’s hands.

“So, no doubt you’ve seen this guy,” Shattock walked up to the camera, shifted it to face the red-faced-man on the table as he was now, but under better lighting, and he

walked backwards over to him. “I like to call him Jerry, you know, like Tom and Jerry, always getting chased and stuff?” He laughed lightly, placing his hand down on the red-faced-man’s large chest, rising up and down slowly. “We’ll folks, here comes the bit you’re not going to believe; Jerry is part of a multi-national-conspiracy to run the world through fear. The only ever half successful attempt at hitting the big old reset button. A product of a method which essentially meant killing off about nine tenths of the world’s populations to start again, a New World Order if you like. That’s right, all those conspiracies you’d heard as a kid, discounted as bullshit and paranoid delusions on all sides, well, unfortunately for a lot of now, very dead, people, it’s all true.” He let out a sigh and patted the belly of the red-faced-man.

“This is insane, fuck this bullshit, I’m not listening to this any further!” The colonel, exclaimed, trying to grab at the panel in Push’s hand as he paused it.

“Michaels, just listen to the man, people are dying! What else can we do?!” Push turned to him pulling the panel away.

“Kwalski, get that cretin over here now!” the colonel shouted, Kwalski brought Wiseman over by the scruff of his neck, still wriggling, trying to get free.

“You’ve got 10 seconds to let me know what I need to hear, Wiseman, or you’re hamburger meat.” The colonel said, drawing his pistol and putting the barrel against the chubby mans head.

“Listen, Michaels, everyone, there was rumours, suspicion, subterfuge...look, I’m on your side! I’m in the dark with all this as much as you guys are, what the fuck do you think I’m doing here!? Look, I issued private investigations dozens of times, 90% of the time the person who I sent snooping ended up dead, well, at least I never heard from them again. I got—”

The colonel lowered his arm quickly and shot a round into Wisemans left thigh, the

large hand gun blowing deep hole in his chubby little leg. Wiseman instantly let out a mighty scream, falling to the floor, Kwalski letting him go as blood spurted out.

“Medic!” Michaels shouted through his comms-stream.

Speciliast Foster came running though the mirrored wall, not a medic, but highly trained in the field of emergency triage, he dived down to Wiseman, on the floor, whimpering.

“Give him some Shock-Release, Foster, and patch him up best you can.” The colonel ordered the specialist. “Right, now, Wiseman, are you ready to let me know what you know?”

“Jesus fucking Christ!” he shouted through spit and tears and sweat and blood. “That’s all I know! Just watch what Shattock is going to tell you, I’m sure there’s more than enough there! There was too much coincidence in the formations of the ghosts, if you study the war effort—”

“I’ve studied what the fuck happened, Wiseman”

“Well, if you paid any fucking attention you might have learnt something, you fucking brute!” he was getting some semblance of articulation back after Foster had injected him with the potent Shock-Release mix. “The way the ghosts attacked!? They came down, wiped out all of our enemies, almost instantly, wiping out masses of population and leaving some in the cities, why leave any at all? Why the slow speed in which they attacked? If they planned on attacking all along, why not just appear, kill everything and everyone and be done with it? Their attack made no logical militaristic sense. They left pockets of population...no reason at all...fuck...just listen to Shattock. Look at this fucking thing!” He screamed pointing at the red-faced-man.

“Push, if you please,” Michaels said, calm and collected to his friend, who started the video again.

“---That’s right gentlemen, this whole thing, the ghosts, the Mist, the almost complete eradication everyone of the entire planet and essentially jailing everyone else that was left under this terrible Mist, it’s all a planned exercise. But it wasn’t to start with, oh no,” he walked around the other side of the red-faced-man. “You see, this guy here, he was a human once, he was one of the first, he was rated what they called a Super-Hive, on their telepath rating system. With gene therapy, drugs, transhuman experiments, and all sorts of other nasty doings, they were trying to create a telepath powerful enough to control the minds of world leaders. Turn them into puppets you know, that whole MK ULTRA thing, kinda like that, but much worse, and privately funded. What they ended up with was something quite different, what they created was, the first...” he raised his hands and gave an inverted commas sign “‘Ghost’. It appeared a short time into their experiments when they were trying to push the boundaries of their first red-faced-man, a by product of their transhuman add-ons by the way. Well, they pushed too far. So far in fact that the outward manifestation of their first test subjects third self appeared and rendered itself in actual-reality. The person that you talk to in your head, the person you see when you’re dreaming, unable to control, but still somehow exert some power over, well, that ‘person’ was basically brought to life.” He slapped his hands down on his sides.

“It was a disaster, the phantom wiped out an entire complex of their staff, literally thousands died before they figured out what was going on and killed their first red-faced-man. Next time though,” he waved a finger at the camera and laughed a little. “Well, they were prepared. They got two, one to control unit, and one to manifest their third-self. With the Control Red, they manipulated what the other one did. They slowly pieced it together, the red-faced-man with their gene therapy and transhuman add-ons was able absorb the minute levels of ectoplasm that exist all around us. Focusing on trying to manipulate those around it, their original purpose, well, the by product would make the

phantom manifest itself in actual-reality. Literally, the subject's thoughts would come to life, well not so much to life, but able to control and manipulate ectoplasm to appear. So, with the control unit not projecting, but manipulating the projector, they could control it to do whatever they wanted. A side-effect of what they had originally planned, but hey," he shrugged, "A good side-effect as far as they were concerned. They had created an apparently indestructible being that never needed to rest, never questioned what it was doing, and was completely malleable. Clever guys, eh?" Shattock moved away from the red-faced-man, pushing his lower lip out with his tongue, raising an eyebrow and typed a few things into a panel embedded into a metal counter protruding from the wall.

"Now, take a look at this," a massive text document started streaming across the screen, they caught its title.

"Passive Human Eradication: Executive order Alpha 22-00-22"

"This is their plan, we managed to get hold of it when we liberated Jerry. You know what it says? It says, whilst they were trying to plan out how to take over the world, progressively, using mind control over a number of decades, they inadvertently discovered a way that could bring the world to its knees in a few months. They planned on killing off 98% of the worlds 'superfluous'..." he did the thing with his fingers again, "Population. Starting again with a type of super race that would re-populate the world, in their vision over a couple of hundred years, men and power, when will we learn. But hey, they almost got there didn't they?" he laughed again, as he appeared back on the screen, fidgety and clearly uncomfortable, holding the back of his head. "They certainly killed a lot of folk, anyway, as all these megalomaniac-types think to themselves, they thought they were benevolent. 'For the greater good,' comes up so many times in that document thing you wouldn't believe

until you'd read it. So, anyway, they went ahead, and that's the start of the Ghost Wars, they bided their time, and then unleashed the Ghost Threat on the world, across the world, leaving pockets of population where they saw fit to carry on the human race after they were done." He pulled a chair from out of shot and sat on it backwards, his legs around the back and he leant down on the top.

"Now, as most plans go, this was working out pretty well, they were creating just enough confusion and death not for complete anarchy to break out, but to make sure they were working through mass populations they thought needed cleaning up. Unfortunately for them, they were a little too good." He slapped his hand against his face, clearly finding the whole sordid tale quite difficult to tell, running his hand down, he pulled at his bottom lip for a second, looking side-to-side with his manic eyes and wiry hair, before he continued.

"Listen, this was a group of about 1000 men globally, working through a vast network funded by vast personal fortunes to acquire ultimate power, but as billions began to die, well, their network began to fear for their own lives and then the whole thing started to crumble. Governments were, surprisingly, a little more organised than they had expected as well. Even though they're crumbled and ruined now, and have essentially been in the pocket of the GIA since the Mist fell, they did manage to set up the Saint Albert Collaboratory Science and Military Program, and as we drew together in secret, this 'Group of Men' began to lose track of what was going on across the world. Instead of crumbling, the governments consolidated and actually did some good, before this group of maniacs had figured out a new plan, the Mist was being manufactured and their Ghosts were essentially rendered useless. And now we have left what we have today, globally, about 120 million people in cities. And what did this 'Group of Men' do? Well, what would you expect, they're cowards, they slipped away, they got the remnants of their network and

buried themselves in, deep in their facilities that they had created on each continent. Right now they're pretty much self sustaining, atomic powered units deep underground with botanic facilities, the finest technology available to take care of their every whim. About 5k in each facility, maintaining the Ghost Threat, they've been trying to figure out a response ever since." He let out a deep sigh, as if all the energy had been drained from him. If he looked bad and insane when he had started, he looked as if he needed to be locked up now.

Push paused the panel, they were all in silent for a split second, stood, the only sound was their breath and the occasionally hissing of pipes funnelling into and out of the red-faced-man.

The colonel turned his arm and the massive reverberating sound of the pistol shooting two rounds into Wiseman's forehead made Push physically jump off the ground.

"What the fuck?!" he turned to the colonel as he landed back down with a small stumble, quickly glancing at Wisemans exploded head as Foster stood up, scraping off bits of brain matter and skull fragments from his sweat-suit. He breathed heavily, with wide eyes, trying to assimilate what he had just been told and what the Michaels had just done.

"Come on Push, the rest of it, you know why I did what I did, collect yourself." Michaels said, low in tone, a lack of emotion, holstering his pistol, his growl as heavy as ever.

"Wha-what, right, uh, Christ," Push replied, still breathing heavily, gulping down dry heaves, the smell of burnt flesh and gunpowder filled the still room, his hands shaking.

"Look, Push, men, if any of you are about to question why I did that, don't. He knew about what was going on, this fucked conspiracy theory, how the government reacted, how after the Mist came down they essentially fell apart and came under the control of and became a tool of the GIA. Wiseman, well, he's pretty much in control of the Northern

Continent. We take orders from the government which are handed down by him, until this shit storm that we're going through now and the military coup that was initiated." He holstered his gun. "Look, until recently he was unchallenged with his Mist Gendarmerie doing his bidding, if he knew about this, about how all this fucking shit came about, and still did nothing to try and free people from the Mist, to let us know what he knew, to take out this fucking 'Group of Men, well, he was acting as a tyrant. He has no mandate, he controlled everyone by force. Filth." The colonel, turned and gestured to spit at Wisemans body, his blood now draining down the small grated hole in the centre of the room, underneath the red-faced-man's oversized chair. "And if he didn't know fully, but knew now, with only the small group of us here, he would have got that big fucking thing up there to kill the lot of us before he moved off to try and find who we're about to try and find. Only his plan of action would have been very different." He finished, lighting his final cigar. "Damn it," he said, lowering his head.

"Shit, what the hell are we about to do, Michaels?" Push said, understanding now what had happened and why. Able to piece it together now his brain had calmed down, he was unable to work under such extreme pressures, the likes of which Michaels and the Dirty Dogs were completely used to.

"Just play that god damned panel, I know what Shattock is going to say, he's going to tell us why this place is empty." The colonel said, raising his head slowly and puffing hard on his cigar.

"Unfortunately for all of us, especially you, Push," Shattock's frozen image became animated again as Push pressed play. "The Mist is a temporary solution, but, as you know we've been unable to find anything better. The government was run by the GIA, which relied on its Mist Gendarmerie to effectively keep people under control, they didn't want to give up their power any more than any man ever has, so they delayed and stretched out

their research efforts. Which, I think, brings us pretty much up to date. The Mist, a perfect short term defence, has given the GIA all the power they could ever want, but now, well, now it has caused these mutations,” he stood up from his chair, readjusting the camera again and standing backwards enough for his whole body to be in view. “The shit has really hit the fan guys, and if you weren’t prepared to listen to me when things were relatively normal, I couldn’t imagine why you would now, since things are so fucked. So, I’ve recorded this message...” he moved his arms around wildly for a second, “...And gone with the people that I’ve got left here to raid the Group of Men’s Northern Continental facility to try and salvage something out of this situation. We did it before, we even managed to get one out, Jerry here, I had 150 volunteers with me that time though, 2 of us came back, fucking massacre. We don’t have enough ectoplasm to use Jerry as a weapon against them, and we don’t have a Controller, so his phantom has to remain in a field of Mist. Now, well, now there’re 40 of us, and we’re going to go back. It’s the only choice we’ve got. If we can somehow get to the main Red Controller, we can hopefully hack its mind and have power over the rest of the Ghosts, we can use them to attack the zombies and vampires and well, there’s a chance we can try and help out those who are left, before we destroy the whole place, free of the ghosts we can lower the Mist. Push, we can start again, you and your family, you can, well, you know, you can live.” He shrugged his shoulders and smiled at the camera. “So, if you’re getting this message, it means there’s nothing left apart from me, the last resort, but, well, I’m not going to say I told you so, but if you’d listened to me in the first place, we might not have been in this position. I’m not sure when you’ll get this, but it will likely be before we get to the Group of Men, we only have a old gas driven bus and minimal Mist protection, we might not even make it at all, but attached to this is panel you’re watching me on, is a tracking panel. If you can get my signal and come and help me, we’ve got one last chance to save whatever’s left of

humanity before we're all zombies or vampires or whatever." He bowed his head for a second and took a deep breath. "This is David Shattock, at the Shattock commune for contemporary Ghost relations, signing off. God speed to us all." He walked up to the camera, his wild face coming in close for a second before the screen went blank and dimmed.

Again, they stood in silence for a few seconds, each collecting their thoughts on what they had come to learn. The dim light of the room flickering, highlighting here and there the plastic sheen of the red and sedated hulk in front of them. Proving to them that, as if the world could get any more crazy, they were in the middle of absolute madness.

"Excuse me, Sir," Kwalski finally blurted in his cocky tone, walking past the essentially decapitated body of Wiseman, kicking it with the toe of his boot and raising an eyebrow, "Just what the fuck are we waiting around for?"

The colonel turned, "Men, on me, move out!" they began running in unison. "Men, there is a very real possibility that Wiseman ordered Tokyo Collider to destroy us if he did not return. Davis, as soon as we're out of the shaft were we came in, you need to take cover and get a clear shot at it's head, two or three well positioned rounds of that sniper rifle of yours should be enough to incapacitate it at the very least. Ruffshot, Kwalski and Foster you need to surround it as soon it whilst it's distracted and open fire at its legs whilst grenading it as best you can. We've got surprise and between us well over a century of combat history on our side, this fucking thing is essentially a few days old, if we can't kill it, well, we deserve to die." He finished as they shimmed up the second stair shaft.

Push broke in, "But hopefully it won't come to that, Colonel, Tokyo could be a real help getting into this facility, I suppose you know that."

"Absolutely, Push, we're going to distract and ask questions as we exit the shaft, there's a slim chance either Wiseman didn't execute any orders, or Tokyo will disobey

them if they were given. But we need to be prepared, now, men, hoods up, let's get ready for this." He replied as they started making their way up the final and longest shaft.

"Captain Alza, get your shit together, get to the rendezvous position Gamma-10, we're on route, t-minus 10 minutes. I'm forwarding you over now where we'll be heading as soon as we're back on board, make the necessary preparations. Also, send out a scout-probe, scanning for human life within a 200 kilometre radius, I want to know as soon as it finds anything, even if it's before you pick us up. Those are your orders," The colonel finished as he exited head first out of the hole in the floor. The world seemed some how different now, he thought. The ghosts aren't some divine warning, just the product of power hungry men. Typical.

"Sir, no encounters with threat, nothing to report." Tokyo Collider turned with heavy steps, walking over to the Colonel, standing up straight as Push emerged from the hole behind him.

"Excellent, now, you're out in front, scan and sweep, we're heading to rendezvous point Gamma-10, get to it soldier." The Colonel replied, finally helping Push out of the hole.

"Sir, where is Wiseman?" Tokyo asked in his thundering voice, stepping up to the colonel, looking down on him.

"There were complications soldier, he's dead, that's all you need to know. We have come into some serious information that is going to help our effort to secure the continued existence of humanity." He walked passed the pillar like leg of the giant beast, Push following him, as the Dirty Dogs began to emerge from the hole.

Tokyo followed the colonel, keeping him in his line of sight, turning again with the heavy steps, kicking up dust. "I have some very specific orders from Wiseman should he not return from your expedition, Colonel," he replied.

The colonel sighed before turning back around to Tokyo, about 20 feet in front of him, still engulfed by the beast's massive shadow. "I thought you might, damn shame that, Tokyo, we sure could have used you on what we're about to do." He said, absolutely confident, staring into the eye of the beast.

"I'm not sure I understand, Colonel." Tokyo replied, the Vulcan cannon on his arm starting to twitch again, spinning momentarily, shooting pangs of high pitched sound into the air.

"Well, that's what field experience gets you Tokyo, you can sure kill, but you're way behind on strategy." The Colonel said, nodding.

"Wait!" his massive voice rumbled as he shifted his weight, spinning with frightening speed and kicking up a cloud of dust. He leaped into the air, at least 40 feet high and forward to the cliff face as he heard a series of high-velocity rounds come from Davis' sniper rifle. He landed with his huge dead weight smashing into the bed rock ground of the small flattened out area where they were. Fragments flew up as the colonel and the others dived for cover.

"Shit! Fucking throw everything you've got at it!" the colonel shouted.

"Wait, I wasn't going to follow them! I'm a soldier, not a puppet!" He roared as he jumped high into the air again, a flurry of grenades and bullets came shooting his way.

"Hold fire!" the colonel shouted, still taking cover. Tokyo landed on the cliff edge again, crushing into the rock even further than before and then leaping forward as the whole area where he landed began to crumble away from the side of the mountain. His gigantic free hand grabbed at the rock, penetrating and sending more stone shrapnel flying the way of the other men. He let out a mighty roar as the rock underneath him fell away and down, thousands of feet to the bottom of where they and found the commune's entrance. He steadied himself for a second, before trying to pull himself back up, on to the

significantly smaller table top area.

“Ruffshot over here, immediately! Give me a grenade!” The colonel shouted as Ruffshot ran over, throwing him the small explosive package. “Listen you beast, you wouldn’t be trying to make a fool of me would you?!” he shouted down at Tokyo Collider as he watched the beast struggling to find footing in the side of the mountain. The Colonel dwarfed by the gigantic, pulsating arm grabbing at rock to his side and the beasts huge head, just over the lip of the edge, breathing heavily roaring with the strain.

“I am a soldier!” Tokyo shouted as the Colonel walked up to him, pulling the pin out of the grenade, ready to roll it into Tokyo’s face, blow him off the side of the mountain.

“Come on, Michaels, step down! He could have taken us all out before Davis even got a shot off if he wanted to, he’s a purpose bread killing machine. You think he couldn’t do that?!” Push shouted running over to the Colonel, careful not to lose his footing and slip off the side of the mountain.

“Fuck!” the colonel shouted, throwing the grenade clear of them all. “You better be right, Push!” He turned as the grenade exploded in the air and Tokyo pulled himself onto the table top area where they all stood.

“Thank you, Colonel,” Tokyo panted, securing his weight. “Thank you for believing me. I’m more than the thing Wiseman grew in a lab, I’m more than Wiseman, I can feel, I can grow, I want to help us.” He finished with huge heavy breaths as he pulled the last of his bulk up and on to the bit of land that was left, carefully looking not to swipe off any of the others.

“You betray me, Tokyo Collider, you’ll never have chance to do any of that stuff you just said,” The colonel replied with a combined tone of dismissal and empathy at the same time. Push mustered as much of a smile as he could given the situation and turned to everyone, the rabble that they were, stood, dishevelled, confused, almost broken, but with

the need and want to struggle on, until the very end. “We need to out of here right now, you think you can carry all of us? Hey? Soldier?” He walked up and slapped the hulk on the back of his calf.

“Not a problem, Sir,” Tokyo replied.

The colonel clapped his hands together. “Excellent, men grab on to whatever you can, we need to get to that bubble-ship as soon as fucking possible. Tokyo, I’ll brief you on the way.”

10 - Hope dies

“Colonel, we’re approaching their position now, we’ll be over them momentarily, you want me to try and open up a comms-stream with them?” Captain Alza said, high up in his cock-pit, controlling the webbing bubble that shrouded the ship as it screamed toward Shattock and his bus of ‘sympathisers’.

“I doubt it’ll do much good Captain, they won’t be in sweat-suits, that’s for sure, I’m not sure they’ll be packing any comms equipment at all. These guys are essentially stragglers that operate by snatch and grab raids on waste dumps. Their lab looked like a trash can. What we throw away, they pilfer.” The colonel replied, pacing up and down the mess hall where he, Push and the Dirty Dogs were grabbing some chow as they raced to grab Shattock and get to the Group of Men’s underground facility in Death Valley.

“Captain, send a ping out on all frequencies, just say we got his message and we’re on his side,” Push looked up from his soy noodles. “It can’t do any harm, and we’re approaching him at twice the speed of sound, he’s going to get some fright if we just bolt right up.” Push went back to shovelling the noodles into his mouth.

“Appreciated. Alza, do as Push says, let me know if we get any response.” The Colonel turned to his men, chewing down on a fresh cigar he’d obtained from the mess hall vending machine. “God damn, cheap ass fucking shit,” he spat fragments of tobacco leaves to the ground. “Men, we’re going to land right up in front of Shattock any minute, make your way to the loading bay. You know the drill, don’t take any risks, always think we’re moving into a trap. We’ll be leaving Tokyo on board for the time being, Shattock might get the wrong idea if he see’s him. Move out!” he finished, trying to light the thinner than usual cigar.

The dirty-dogs stood, leaving their half finished plates and started moving to the

loading bay, grabbing their rifles as they went.

“Push, wait a second.” The colonel motioned to his friend. He walked up to him, looking into his deep blue eyes, letting his swagger drop for a second as they stood in the Mist evacuated mess-hall. “Christ, you think this is the right thing to do? Jesus, Push, I don’t know, why don’t we just go straight to this Group of Men’s base, we’ve got the coordinates? Skip Shattock, he’s probably just going to get in the way anyway,” he finished, blowing smoke to the side of Push’s head.

Push thought, not like Michaels to question his own orders, there must be some serious fatigue kicking in. “Well, he could be some use, he’s been to this place before, and we don’t have any floor plans or anything, we’re going in totally blind, too much rests on the outcome of this mission not to pick him up.” He replied, placing his hand on Michaels’ shoulder.

“Push, what the fuck is wrong with this world? All this red-faced-man stuff? A global conspiracy of men for world domination that managed to stay completely hidden? I’m starting to wonder if this is all some sort of overplayed out nightmare, fuck.” He turned away from Push, uneasy at his momentary lapse, letting his guard down and showing emotion. “You know, it got bad, then it got worse, then it got so bad it was almost funny, then it got even worse, and now, Jesus, it’s a fucking biblical nightmare, what the hell is the problem with us, humans I mean? We’ve turned god damned fairy tale and legend, the worst possible beasts we could ever imagine, into reality, and now we’re on the brink of extinction, and we’re the fucking cause. We created all this, what’s it all worth?” He dipped his head, growling to himself and punched his fist into his open palm.

“Look, Michaels, we’re in this for one thing, remember? My family, we’ve got that, if we can save that, none of this, this shit,” he waved his right arm around the inside of the hall. “None of it matters, just them, my pregnant wife and my daughter. Just focus on that,

we're not fighting to save humanity, we're not fighting to make sure more people like Wiseman can try their hand at taking over again. We're going to do our very best to make sure my family survive, to bring some good out of this fucked world of men and horror." Push grabbed his shoulder and turned him so they faced each other. He gritted his teeth and his jaw muscles pulsed, his eyes intense, he looked into the eyes of his friend and saw hope.

"I'm going to kill everyone and everything I don't like until your family is safe again, Push. I just hope someone tries to stop me, Push, because it'll mean there's more of them for me to kill." He puff on his cigar and ordered up a fresh batch of amphetamines.

"Sir, we're coming up on Shattock now, no response from the message ping, but his bus, transport, thing, well whatever it is, it has stopped. The road they're on, it's wide enough for me to land so we'll be able to get in real close, right in front, about 100 yards, drop the bay ramp and you can do your thing, we'll have our cannons tracking the bus." Alza finished.

"Excellent work, Captain." Michaels replied, already on his way down to the loading bay, with Push. His cigar flicked, his fists clenched, his hood up, striding with purpose again.

"Colonel, we're eager to get this done and get on to the facility, we all know time is ticking away." Ruffshot said to the colonel through their re-established comms-stream as he walked into the loading bay.

"You don't have to tell me, Corporal. Now, nice and easy, by the numbers, move up to the transport, we're expecting a friendly welcome, but like I said, stay frosty." He replied as they bumped onto the ground, bending at the knees for a second and watching the loading bay door drop.

"Move out, men!" The colonel shouted as they yet again stomped down the loading

bay door, out of the Mist shroud of the Bubble-ship and into the open atmosphere. Their sweat-suits stopped drawing the lines of their surroundings and fed them with the open air environment but continued to float aiming crosshairs around what they were seeing.

They saw the old transport 100 yards or so down the wide dirt road, wide enough for the bubble ship to land in it, only just crushing a few trees that were either side of them. They paced up, guns hoisted, muscles clenched.

The Colonel shouted out as he walked down the loading bay ramp, behind the other men, “Shattock, you in there?! We got your message, we’re here to help, this is all we’ve got I’m afraid! Where the hell are you?!”

They waited a second, Ruffshot and his men now outside what looked like the entrance to the old converted school bus. Surrounded by Perspex and full of mist, it looked like they had tried to create some sort of weird shell around it so they would at least have some protection from any Ghost threat they encountered. There was a latch on the right hand side toward the front.

Ruffshot lifted it slowly and the door swung open under its own weight. Mist poured out and engulfed him. His goggles picked up on the Mist and drew lines all around what he was just looking at with his bear eyes.

“Shattock!” he shouted inside the bus, “I’m coming in, I’m armed, so don’t try any funny shit, if you’re in there, well, stand down now, we’re here to help!” Ruffshot stepped inside the Perspex casing and the few steps inside the bus itself. He scanned quickly, it was empty.

“Colonel, I don’t get it, it’s fucking—” he jumped out of the bus with double speed as he heard a roar from all around the bus, he’d heard that roar before, but not for a long time, not from men. A war cry. He came out of the shell of the bus, out of the Mist and saw a wall of men running from the forest on the side they were on, some with a few old looking

pistols, a couple with damaged looking rifles, the rest with medieval looking axes and big chopping swords. None of them suited, they looked like a real rabble, hardly enough to make his heart race.

“Colonel, what the hell should we do?” Ruffshot said through their comms-stream, holding his fire as a few badly aimed rounds shot passed them.

“Hold your ground, Corporal, only fire to injure, no casualties. Tokyo, evasive manoeuvre Delta-17.” He finished as he watched the rabble emerge, a few dozen yards back and saw Ruffshot and his men pick off a few of them, shooting at their legs.

“Shattock! We’re here to help!” He shouted again.

“Bullshit! There’d be more of you, this is an assassination team, you’ve come to kill me!” Shattock emerged from the forest close to them, running with an axe, looking crazier than ever, his other arm flaying all over, his clothes covered with blood, eyes bulging.

His paced slowed, visibly out of breath as Tokyo Collider landed, directly in front of the bus. The rabble fighting hand-to-hand with the four strong team of Ruffshot, Davis, Foster and Kwalski, who were easily holding their own. Tokyo let out a gigantic roar and smashed his hand down on top of the transport vehicle, crunching the metal in between his gigantic fingers, picking it up from the front, clear into the air and throwing it hundreds of yards into the forest.

Silence.

What was left of the rabble turned and ran back into the forest. Shattock still running, wielding his axe, tripped and skidded on his belly to Michaels feet. “Are you prepared to listen now?” The Colonel looked down at him, stepping on his arm as he pulled his hood off and Push walked up behind him doing the same.

“Get up Shattock, you crazy bastard.” He said, offering him his hand.

“Jesus, what the fuck is that thing, is it here too kill us?!” Shattock replied,

scrambling to his feet, jittery and crazy as always, trying to grab at his tennis shoe that had come off as he tripped. Hopping about on one foot.

“He’s on our side, Shattock, which means he’s on your side as well. We’re not here to kill you, right?!” Michaels grabbed him by the shoulders and steadied him, making sure their eyes met, desperately trying to get his message through to him.

“Shit, right, what the hell?” Shattock started, gulping air before starting to dry heave.

“Jesus, pull your shit together, Shattock, we need to get on the way, order your men out of the forest and to get on our ship.” Michaels stood beside him, looking away, almost embarrassed.

“Wow, that was unexpected, right, my men, of course,” he stood back up, looking around before sticking his hands in his mouth and whistling loudly. Nothing happened.

“Come on you guys! Seriously! We’re fine,” he bent back over again and started to vomit this time.

“Ruffshot, you and Kwalski round up whoever ran into the forest, Foster, Davis, you get the injured into the ship. Tokyo, stand guard.” A series of affirmative replies can quickly through the Colonels comms-stream.

“Holy...so it’s a Tokyo Collider...it’s okay, it’s okay, I’m getting myself together now.” Shattock wiped his mouth on his bloody sleeve and stood up straight. “Wow, okay, let’s get going,” he breathed out heavily. “Push, good to see you, sorry about that, god, how come you’re so calm, look at you in that thing, when did you become a soldier?” He asked him, hobbling passed and pointing at Push’s sweat suit.

“The second people started mutating into vampires, I got my commission when they started turning into zombies.” Push replied with an air of sarcasm, following Shattock as Foster and Davis ran past carrying four men, one on each shoulder.

“Right, right, right, well, we’re in the shit now aren’t we? So you’re not here to kill us,

what's going on, why's there not more of you?" Shattock replied, holding his stomach as they entered into the Mist bubble of the ship. "Guys, uh, I can't see anything in this Mist."

"Here, put this on." Michaels threw him a sweat-suit down the ramp, almost knocking him over as he caught the heavy costume.

"Right, so, what's the deal. Why so few?" He replied, crawling into the suit.

"This is all we could afford to take with us, the cities are fucked, we're loosing and loosing badly, Shattock, if we don't get to that facility that you were talking about, and fast, there's not going to be anything left worth saving."

"No kidding, right, well, we better get this show on the road," he said, pulling his suit on and his hood over his head. "Now, how do I work this thing again, it's been a long time since general emergency orientation, you know? And I'm sure you've made a few improvements in the mean time." He clicked a few buttons on the forearm, adjusted his goggles. "Right there."

"Sir, that's the last of them, 39 men accounted for," Ruffshot said, marching the last few he had just retrieved from the forest, up the loading bay ramp.

"Shattock, 39 sound right?" The colonel replied, linking the scientist into their collective comms-stream.

"Three missing, but they've probably deserted after seeing the Tokyo Collider, we're a fragile bunch." He replied.

"No shit, look, this one's pissed his pants." Kwalski jabbed the man in front of him with the barrel of his gun.

"Kwalski! They're on our side!" Michaels shouted down at him.

"Sir, yes, sir," he replied quickly composing himself.

"Right, well, good," the colonel turned away from the group. "Alza, get us there as soon as you can." He said down the comms-stream to the captain.

“Sir, Shattock got about 100 miles in the few hours he had on us, 600 miles left with the coordinates we’ve been given, I’ll have us there in about 5 minutes.”

“Excellent news—”

“Jeeze, how fast can this thing go?” Shattock interjected.

“Mach 7 at a push,” the colonel replied instinctively. “Anyway, that’s not what’s important. Right, Ruffshot, where are we?”

“39 men brought on board, 16 in sick-bay, one critical, 23 suited and in the mess hall waiting further instructions.” He replied, running up to the colonel in the huge loading bay. Tokyo Collider stomping past them and moving into his gigantic holding unit.

“Christ, Foster, get them down here now. Ruffshot, I thought I told you to go easy on them?” The colonel asked, half heartedly.

“Sir, we did, sir. They’re scientists and hippies, it was hard not to mess them up, they had spears for Christ sake, what sort of outfit carries spears?” he answered.

“What the hell would you like us to carry, Ruffshot? What sort of name is Ruffshot anyway, you sound like a god damn mad man,” Shattock interjected, half squaring up to him.

“Hey, you two, we’ve got 4 minutes to brief everyone before we hit the ground running. Shattock, I need to know everything you know about the layout of this place right fucking now. I don’t think I need to tell you, we’re in this one for the fucking race. General Comms-Channel open.” He said, opening his comms-stream to everyone on the ship including the newly recruited and suited members out of Shattocks group.

“Listen, and listen fast.” Michaels reaffirmed himself, a true leader of men. “There’s no time for pleasantries, no time for theory, no time to debate or question or render, there’s just orders and action, that’s it. You’re under military jurisdiction now Shattock, you and your men, I say something, you do it. You were about to walk into a situation and get

massacred again, you now have a chance, we both now have a chance, Christ, humanity has a chance. If we go in there guns blazing we're likely to take out the very thing we need to utilize to save who and whatever is left in the cities, if you'd gone in there without us, you'd have failed, plain and simple. Good, come in, line up here, all of you," The colonel said as the 23 other men, Foster and Davis streamed in.

"Now we have each other, which means we're instantly up on numbers and better equipped to handle the situation. Shattock, tell me and my men the layout of the base."

"Well, there's not a whole lot to tell, they're not very well defended, they never expected to be attacked, they've got minimal defences, I say minimal, I mean—" He started, holding his hand up to his face.

"I like the sound of that." Kwalski spoke up.

"If you let me finish. They're buried deep, deep under ground, their complex is vast. Twice size of the GIA head quarters. It's a luxury facility though, not a military or government installation. The first floor is approx 400 meters under ground, this is the living quarters, so, if now we've got some good fire power, we've got the upper hand..." he paused.

"What do you mean, exactly, by, the upper hand, Shattock?" Push asked.

"Well, like I said, it's a luxury facility, the service lift is easily hackable, and it's huge, big enough for the Tokyo Collider to fit in as well as a few others, and the floors, well, they're not like you or I are used to. They're massive, the living quarters are in a hall like a big mall from before the Mist, you remember?" He gestured through the Mist. "High ceilings, ornate, nicely decorated, well lit, all of that stuff, they were in for the long haul down there as they figured out what to do next, and they had the money to make it as opulent as they possibly could. Which means, we get Tokyo Collider down there, and we can take out 90% of the residents in one fail swoop. Scientists, conspirators, guards,

everyone,” He turned to Tokyo. “Don’t think I somehow missed that cannon on your arm. I’m a scientist but no fool.” He turned back around.

“Right well, if that’s the case, sounds like we do have the upper hand. What about the red-faced-men, Shattock, they’re the important part?” The Colonel spoke up.

“Yes, they’re in the deepest part of the facility, approximately 600 meters below the surface. Again, minimal security, service elevator, and such. They’ve got their huge botanical areas for their food supply on the floor below the living quarters, then an area for live-stock, then their hydro, power, recycling facilities, all of which are largely unpopulated self automated areas. Then the red-faced-men at the bottom, where their atomic power generators are. Hundreds of them all lined up, with huge vats of ectoplasm supplying the men with just enough to breach actual-reality with their minds. Then there’s the Red-Controller. This guy’s about the same size as Tokyo, but totally inert, it’s him we need to get to, I can get us there. Hayley, come over here.” he finished and gestured his arm invisibly in the Mist filled loading bay.

A small set of eyes came from in between a few of the rabble of sympathisers and scientists that could still stand. She came briskly over to Shattock and stood upright next to him. “Guys, this is Hayley Bones, she’s the only other person that came out of our original raid alive, she’s my closest friend and senior advisor.”

“Jeeze, one of them is a girl? Who would have knew?” Kwalski piped in.

“Hey everyone,” a happy and confident voice came through the comms-stream to the other man, “Kwalski, how you like that new lip I gave you?”

Kwalski let out a sharp laugh, “No shit...” he trailed off mumbling to himself.

“Well,” the Colonel paused for a second, “Well, outstanding, that just means we’ve got more directional support than we anticipated. I take it you can remember your way around this place?” he finished, walking over to the 5 feet 2 inch high, floating set of eyes.

“Yeah, no problem, Colonel, Sir, Colonel.” She broke off.

“Just call me Michaels, Bones.” He replied turning away.

“Just one more thing, Colonel, and everyone else. There’s no families down there, they’ve got virtual systems for getting themselves off, they didn’t expect to have to be down there long enough to reproduce. What I’m saying is, don’t worry about getting any women or kids.”

“Outstanding. Elza, sit-rep?” The colonel replied as a series of hands clapped and rubbed together in the background.

“We’re coming up on it now, Colonel, on the button, I can land us at the exact co-ordinates, nice and flat in death valley. Currently no signs of threat.”

“Good, keep an eye out, land us when I finish talking,” He turned back to his men, Push stood beside him, Shattock and Bones stood slightly in front of their scientific rabble.

“Right, is everyone prepped for projectile based combat? Ruffshot I’m speaking to you?”

“Sir, we’re armed to the teeth, we’re packing everything this ship has to offer. We’re ready to fuck shit up. Sir” Ruffshot replied, coughing at his lapse, forgetting he was talking to his Colonel for a second.

“Just as well, Ruffshot, we’re going to need everything we’ve got, I’m sure. Right—”

“Sir, Alza, here. We’re prepping for landing, or do you want us to hold?”

“Land in one minute exactly, Captain. Right, this is how it’s going to work you bunch of hooligans, you feel like saving humanity today? Well do you?”

“Sir, yes, sir!” the Dirty Dogs replied in unison, with a slight murmur from the scientific rabble of Shattocks men.

“Well, that’ll have to do. Big man, how about you?” he turned to Tokyo Collider.

“Sir, as Corporal Ruffshot said, I’m ready to fuck shit up, sir.”

Michaels let out a heavy laugh and slammed the butt of his fist into his hand, "Right. Tokyo, you and the dirty dogs, you're up first. Seek and destroy, snatch and grab, shit and fan technique, we're not talking about finesse here, you fucking kill everything and everyone that gets in your way and you support Push here, who's going to be going in with you." He slapped Push on the back. "Bones, seeing as you and Kwalski are getting so close, you can be their guide. Ruffshot, hack that lift, Tokyo, blast that first level, dirty dogs, move through, down to the red-faced-man room, get Push to the Red-Controller. Push you do your thing. We'll follow up, move in with these guys, sweeping for anything or anyone left and make our way down to the bottom level, we'll help, if necessary hold the position so we can get control of the red-controller. Listen, if luck's on our side, and god damn we've had such a streak of bad luck that it might just be, well, we can do this thing in 30 minutes flat."

"Sir, looks like that luck of yours isn't kicking in yet, we've got threat incoming," Alza said through the comms stream

"What the fuck? Shattock, what the hell is this?!" he shouted in response.

"Oh god," He paused.

"Come on!"

"I...I guess they've improved their defences since we made our first raid."

"Alza! Evasive manoeuvres! Lay down mist shells, cover that entrance, we need to get in there at all costs!"

"Sir, we've only got 4 left,"

"Affirmative, drop three, now! Ruffshot, you and your men, grab the fourth shell out of the loading tube, reprogram for manual detonation."

"Sir, I think I understand. Yes, sir."

"Tokyo, you're going to carry that Mist shell into that place, explode it on the living

quarters floor, if that's what it still is, and then shoot everything that moves with your arm cannon. You'll be protected from any threat whilst you wipe out the majority of their numbers."

"Michaels," Shattock spoke up with fear in his voice. "You, you can't do that, if the mist hits a red-faced-man, well, it renders them inoperable, they can't produce their apparition any more, we'd be fighting for nothing."

"Fuck you, Shattock! Jesus Christ, what the fuck are we meant to do now? Elza how is that shelling coming?!"

"Shells deployed and at 50% release, another minute and we'll be ready to set down."

"Right, Shattock, you've really fucked this thing up. Push, any ideas?"

"We've got no choice, take the mist shell, explode it on the first floor, hope to god that the mist doesn't make it down to the bottom levels. But, after that first floor we're basically completely defenceless. We can't lay down Mist corridors in the red-faced-man room, and they're likely to have threat in there. Jesus, I guess we'll figure that out when we get down there."

"100% Mist spread, I'm taking her into land."

"Okay, that's the best we've got. Ruffshot, get moving, we'll try to keep as many as we can of their threat occupied, God knows what you've got waiting for you. God speed gentlemen." He slapped Ruffshot on the back as they came back over from the mist shell tube, Toyko holding the gigantic canister like weapon in his free hand. The ship landed and the loading bay dropped to the ground.

"Move, move, move!" Ruffshot shouted as his men followed him, Tokyo running with his gigantic strides.

"Fuck, take cover!" he shouted, jumping to the dirt floor as a stream of shots

pitter-pattered into the ground around them. “They’ve got some sort of god damn battery on that service lift,”

“Sir, two automatic sentry guns, I’ve got them in my sights, they’re hanging from the archway of the entrance.” Davis shouted through the commotion.

“Take the shot, man!” Two loud bangs from Davis’ high-velocity sniper rifle. “Right, move up,” they continued running the few hundred yards to the silver archway embedded in a wall of red-rock, in keeping with the natural surroundings.

“Kwalski, hack that panel, Tokyo, get that shell ready. Foster, Davis, watch Bones,” The sound of pneumatic pistons and spinning locks whirled into the air.

“Good work Kwalski, shit you’re fast.”

“Sir, I didn’t do anything yet!”

“Fuck, men, brace!” he shouted as the doors shifted backwards with a crunch and opened, revealing a line of about a dozen sweat-suited men.

“Fuck you, fuckers!” Ruffshot opened fire, quickly followed by everyone apart from Tokyo. The men quickly fell, shooting a few rounds up into the air as they whaled backwards, blood and guts splattering across the roof of the lift and shooting out, forwards over the dry, dusty, desert ground.

“Dickheads.” Kwalski said, stepping over the dead bodies into the gigantic service elevator, partially filled with mist, gun smoke and blood.

“Kwalski, get us below ground now. Tokyo, get your ass in here.”

“Oh fuck, I think I’m going to puke” Bones shouted as Tokyo, stepped in, on top of one of the bodies, crushing it and flattening it out underneath his gigantic foot, squirting blood in all directions.

“Hey, listen, listen to me, focus on the lines,” Push said to Bones, grabbing her shoulders, “I know what it’s like, focus on the green lines, I know the mist isn’t that thick in

here, just focus on the lines and don't think about the madness, it's going to get a whole lot worse, very quickly."

Kwalski laughed out again, "No shit, Burrows. Right, we're moving." The lift jarred and started it's decent.

"Ruffshot, progress update" the colonel shouted through their comms-stream.

"We're on our way down, no casualties to report. We're in for some fun now colonel."

"Excellent, good hunting gentlemen, we'll do what we can topside. Hopefully we can distract some of their threat." His voice crackled out.

"Brace yourselves, men. Bones, how you holding up?" Ruffshot asked without a hint of emotion in his entirely concentrated voice.

"Good, good, I'll be fine."

"Right, keep your head down, stay behind me, things are going to go very bad for a lot of people, very quickly. Tokyo crack that mist shell open now. Fill this room, as soon as those doors open, throw it as far as you can and get that cannon of yours going as quickly as you can."

"Affirmative."

The doors clicked backwards again and opened, they saw the Romanesque courtyard, hundreds of meters long, full of whites and gold's and marble and pillars, blue ceilings painted with clouds and angels, all encompassed with one singular theme, panic.

Hundreds of men running in all directions, screaming and shouting, pointing, looking, weeping, all dressed in robes, like an ancient Roman senate, 400 meters underground and lit by artificial means, a huge fountain in the middle. A stream of black came running through from the opposite end of the hallway, a hundred or so men in sweat-suits with automatic guns and a good pace.

Tokyo roared at them as they emerged from the Mist filled elevator and launched the shell like a gigantic metallic America football. It smashed down on the fountain and exploded in a huge cloud of Mist. The screams reached their pinnacle and the gunfire started.

“If it moves, kill it!” Ruffshot screamed to his men.

Tokyo’s huge arm cannon started spinning, the dirty dogs, Push and Bones ran to his side, escaping the screaming noise. 20mm rounds escaping at 100 per second, 6000 per minute, the hallway began to explode with blood and flesh, the screams of the men drowned out, return fire began streaming in over their heads.

The room, half full with Mist was turning into an ugly blood bath, a slaughter house, they could make out both the disintegrating bodies of the old men, torn to ribbons by the huge slugs, and the glowing eyes of their armed enemy running toward them, dropping in numbers at an impressive rate.

Kwalski stood up straight, grabbed one of the guns from the dead inside the lift to accompany his own, swinging both stocks into the pits of his elbows, he moved out of the elevator slowly and joined Tokyo in the stream of fire.

“That’s right! Get some! Fuckers! Get some!” He screamed as his bullets helped in tearing up everything and anything in the huge hallway, quickly descending into absolute madness.

“Jesus, okay, enough! They’re all dead, okay?!” Bones screamed through the comms-stream as she stood, running over to Tokyo and reigning down light fists on his calf.

“Bones, get back, look, it’s okay, it’s okay.” Push turned her and tried to cradle her head in the pit of his shoulder but she struggled free. “Look, this had to happen, they were the bad guys, we’re the good guys, look, he’s stopping.”

“Hey, Bones, calm the fuck down why don’t you, we’re in the middle of a fucking war.”

Kwalski quickly picked himself back up off the floor after the surprisingly fast and strong uppercut from Bones.

“Jesus, fuck”

“Bones, where’s the other service elevator?” Push voiced, as Tokyo’s cannon whirred still. Eager to get going, unable to see the human carnage now strewn all over the hall because of the thick Mist, he was holding it together better than he imagined he could.

No motion, just the splash of feet in puddles of blood, all he could hear beyond the ringing in his ears. “The other side of the fucking hallway,” Bones finally spoke, standing square with Kwalski, “Where those other soldier types were coming from, there.” She turned and pointed.

“Right, move!” Ruffshot shouted as they started to stomp across the huge room, now nothing more than a thick paste of blood, tissue, granite, marble and dust.

“Wait, what the fuck was—” A shaft of stone and rock came shooting in from the ceiling, landing straight down on Foster, crushing him flat instantly.

“Holy shit, the roof’s coming in, fuck, you shot out all the support columns Tokyo.” Ruffshot said as their pace doubled instantly, nearing the service elevator on the other side of the chamber, jumping over the thick mess that was spread like mince meat over the floor.

“Wait, we might need his canister launcher,” Push replied, darting backwards as others reached the elevator.

“Fuck it, Push, get the fuck in here!” Ruffshot screamed as Push skidded in the mush, pushing up a wave of bits and blood. Falling to the ground and grabbing the gun he

rolled onto his front as more rock and debris fell from the roof. He jumped to his feet, sprinting forwards as boulders fell down around him, swamping him in guts.

Screaming he jumped the last few yards into the elevator as Kwalski pressed the buttons, taking them down to the red-controller room.

“Push, for fuck sake, you do what I tell you to, right? You fucking die, we’re doing this for nothing, you got me? What the fuck can we do with that canister launcher now? Shattock said we can’t use it in the controller room didn’t he?” Ruffshot panted as the lift shot down, further into their abyss.

“Sorry Ruffshot, I’m thinking on my toes here. Look, we get down there, there’s going to be literally hundreds, if not thousands of red-faced-men, right, Bones?” he replied, trying to catch his breath, dropping the canister launcher to the floor.

“Yeah, you’re right, we only saw one part of it, and that had at least a few hundred, I know where the Red-Controller is, he takes care of all of them—”

“Right, well, it’s called collateral damage we lose a few to win the majority. Ruffshot. Davis, Kwalski, how good are you guys with this thing?” he pointed to the canister gun.

“Not nearly as good as Foster,” Davis replied instantly, “...but, I’d say I’m still the best out of who we’ve got here, I can lay down a pretty accurate Mist corridor for us, how long are we looking?”

“About the same length as the room we’ve just come from, but much wider, but we don’t have to bother about that, the Red-Controller is basically back across the room, where the first elevator we came down in is. We get through the field of red-faced-men, we’re there, no problem.” Bones replied.

“Shit, I recon I can do it.”

“Fuck!” Someone screamed. Tokyo punched through the slowly opening doors of the elevator as it hit the bottom of its shaft. Taking a few dozen rounds to his gigantic

chest, he'd spotted a series of sentry guns that instantly homed in on their group and let loose.

He roared again with increased intensity, lifting his arm and hearing the scream, the rest of the party dived to the blood soaked bottom of the elevator. The pitch black of the huge room flickered with the piercing flame of Tokyo's Vulcan cannon.

"Tokyo, fuck, just be accurate!" Push tried to shout through the screaming fire of the heavy weapon.

"Incoming threat!" Tokyo screamed as a series of ghost shot their way toward them. "Here!" he roared in his deeply terrifying growl, he ran into the middle of the room, shifting his gigantic bulk with a surprising finesse through the small gaps in the rows of red-faced-men. He tracked the purple glows in his night vision and tried to draw their attention. Waving his free arm in the air, he sputtered with blood from the tiny little holes in his chest that would have killed any normal man dead. "Here, you demons!"

"Wait, what the fuck are you doing!" Ruffshot shouted, jumping to his feet. "Foster! A line of Mist, look, right down the middle of these two rows. We're going to take out a few here, Push, but that's the best we can do."

"Don't worry about Tokyo, his heads impenetrable to the threat remember, he was built for this. Just give me a fucking mist corridor!"

Davis clicked the first canister out of the firing cartridge up into the air, caught it as it dropped and slammed it against the floor, quickly filling the elevator with the first protective barrier they needed.

"No!" Kwalski screamed as Bones stepped forward with a weird confidence, lunging for her. Ruffshot grabbed his soldier back before he too could escape the first defensive cloud of Mist, as Davis quickly eyed up the trajectory of his next shot.

"Fucking stupid girl!" He tried to force himself free of Ruffshot. She fell to the floor in

front of all of them as a ghost swooped down, it's ethereal, purple glowing body disappearing inch by inch into her face, before re-emerging a split second later out the back of her skull, glowing a more fearsome purple than before. Like it had been recharged, it had fed on her bio electro-magnetic energy, it had scooped her essence out, it had increased itself, and brought her to zero.

"Fuck! Let her go man!" Ruffshot slammed Kwalski to the floor.

"Soldiers! Incoming!" Push shouted over the turmoil as Davis launched canister after canister, laying out a corridor for Push to run through. Tokyo Collider's eight barrels began to spin again, this time seemingly at half speed, as to gain more accuracy shooting across the room at the dozens of glowing eyes that were emerging from the far right side of the chamber. Threat swooping in and around him, trying to penetrate his gigantic cranium with no success, he took aim.

"Kwalski, cover me and Push, we're going for the control room!" Ruffshot shouted as they both took off through the corridor of Mist that had been laid out for them. Kwalski had already started firing, aiming toward the crowd of eyes diminishing rapidly in a hail of fire.

He grabbed the original canister from the floor of the elevator and ran, lifting it above his head, a slight cloud of Mist covering him, firing with his other arm, screaming.

"You fuckers! I'll kill you all!" He charged into about six of them as bullets shot passed him, all tumbling to the floor, he was on his feet in an instant. Dropping the canister and pulling a gigantic Ghurka Khukuri blade from his thigh holster with his free arm he chopped and sliced and shot relentlessly.

"You son's of bitches!" He screamed, the glowing eyes around him dropping to meet the already dead ones at his feet. Red splashes of blood squirting passed him in fountains of electric green as the night vision of his goggles tried to illuminate the carnage.

"Kwalski, get your ass back under fucking cover, Marine! That's a fucking order!"

Ruffshot shouted, looking to his side as he tried desperately to protect Push, both of them running through the thin Mist corridor.

Kwalski let out a scream as a stray bullet ricocheted off a metal chair of one of the red-faced-men, exploding his kneecap. He dropped to the floor as more soldiers came streaming out of the night, guns blazing, shooting white bursts of fire and glowing slugs of metal into his green night vision.

“Come get it you cock suckers!” Shouting, spaying spit inside his sweat-suit hood, he slammed his forearm against the head of a red-faced-men at this side and pumped himself with all the amphetamine his suit cloud muster. “Now, you’re all in a whole world of fucking trouble!” he threw his gun at the ever approaching wall of flesh as he ran out of bullets and stood back to his feet.

Oblivious to the pain of his wound, the slight protective Mist of the small canister blew away as stray bullets shot through it, grabbing at the remnants. He charged with a limp, wielding the huge blade, he forced it deep into the skull of the first man he met, removing it instantly, swinging backwards and couching, slicing through the knee joints of two others. The five feet gap in between the chairs of the red-faced-men, quickly filling with bodies.

“That’s it, you’re on your own!” Davis shouted to Push and Ruffshot as he dropped the empty canister gun, picked up his sniper rifle and a half depleted canister and bolted in the direction of Kwalski, watching the blood and bone and chunks of flesh fly into the air as the clearly untrained men shot randomly and fearfully into the dark.

“Fuck! Almost there, Push?!” Ruffshot shouted as they reached the staircase of the chamber that housed the red-controller.

“Give me all the time you can, once I’m in there I can try to call off the threat in here, just kill anything you can without getting fucked up by ghosts.”

“You got it,” Ruffshot dived back down the stairs as Push swung the huge steel door open to the room. Lights pinged on and he tripped as his goggles adjusted back to their normal mode.

“Push, you’ve got incoming threat, 10 seconds!” Toyko choked through the comms-stream.

He jumped to his feet and scrambled at the control panel in front of him, panting, his knees shaking with physical terror, he screamed and slammed his balled fists down on the panel, not understanding the esoteric readouts and streaming screens of information. He slammed his fists down again.

“Fuck you!!” He screamed turning to the red-controller, the huge beast lay on its back in the dimly lit room, overlooking the chamber of horrors before them, occupied by raging death. He smashed his fists down on the huge legs of the beast as the ghosts drew ever closer, bringing immanent, honourless death.

He heard a hissing sound coming from underneath the huge table on which the beast rested, he searched, he scrambled with the purest of fear and panic rattling through his very core. He grabbed at a huge, arm thick pipe at the back of the head of the beast. It came free easily, spurting thick, clear, ectoplasmatic liquid all over him like a huge frothing hose of evil.

The ghosts shot through the window of the chamber and his world went silent, he prepared himself for the death he had dreaded for years, one he wasn’t ready for, not yet, but he had no choice.

He screamed, standing to his feet, pulling his hood back and off, lifting his arms high and clenching his fists. Screaming until the air in his lungs was entirely exhausted, and he fell to his knees. He opened his eyes and two ghosts hovered in front of him, completely motionless, bobbing like floats on the end of a fishing line, up and down, in the

still water of a pond.

“Push! Snap the fuck out of it!” Ruffshot screamed through the comms-stream before a gurgling sound reverberated through his ears. A sound that caused him to move quickly around the two ghosts that floated in front of him.

“No!” he punched his still balled fists against the thick Plexiglas as the screaming sounds streamed through. He pulled his hood back on, switched his goggles to night mode and zoomed through the dark, seeing the flaring barrels of guns and their laser like bolts shooting through the air. The remnants of the dirty dogs were overpowered by sheer numbers, pouring out of the dark, three great men, three warriors, overpowered by rampant lunacy.

Tokyo Collider was on his knees, blood still spilling out of his gigantic chest, unable to navigate the thin corridors between red-faced-men without crushing or breaking them. Barely able to stand at all. His gigantic Vulcan arm span ferociously but with no ammunition it screamed a shallow call.

“Make this right, Push!” Ruffshot shouted through the comms-stream before his end was engulfed with the sound of tearing and crunching.

“This mess! This mess! My family!” Push screamed back to no answer. He leapt forward at the control panel, pumped himself with amphetamines and focused, scanning the panel before him.

Relentlessly analysing, controlling himself with key precision, turning himself into a tool, a mechanism to understand and operate what could save him, save them all. He jabbed and saw wave lengths change, he saw oscillating patterns, fractals and colours and numbers shifting, he understood it.

He jumped back around, grabbing the huge spurting hose still pumping out thick ectoplasm onto the floor of the room. He slammed it back into place, entering the rear skull

of the Red-Controller.

The ghosts that were in the room turned and swooped through the lines of enemy that had disposed of the Dirty-Dogs and were running towards to control room. They dropped dead instantly.

Push stabbed at the panel again and the ghosts disappeared, leaving a slight purple residue in the air where they had just massacred what was left of the Group of Men's defence.

"It's worked! It's worked!" He screamed as he fell back to his knees. "Colonel, Michaels, Mann are you there?!" he shouted down the comms-stream.

"I'm here, the threat has disappeared, anything to do with you?" he replied in his calm, authoritative voice.

"They're all dead, Mann, they're all dead, they're all dead."

"They died in battle, they died with honour, Push, it was a good death"

"Oh, Christ! I've done it, I've figured it out, we're saved, it worked, it fucking worked!"

"Jesus wept, Push, I knew you could do it."

"Mann, get onto all the commands you can, tell them to get out of the cities, to stop Mist production, to run away as far as they can until we use the ghosts to take care of everything. Tell them and patch me through to my family, Mann, just do it, just let me hear their voices."

"Right away. Alza, emergency patch to my office in the Mist HQ."

Silence.

"Push, Push? Is that you?" Elizabeth's soft voice streamed across the air-waves and into Push's ear. He unmasked himself again and held his gloved hands to his face, beginning to weep uncontrollably.

“Elizabeth, I did it, we’re saved.”

“Daddy? Daddy! Help us daddy! They’re coming daddy, I can hear them!” A little voice came through, full of terror and soft panic.

“Don’t worry baby, it’ll be okay, daddy will come, you just watch, daddy will come, don’t worry baby. Shhh, quiet now.” Elizabeth’s voice trembled and was followed by the all too familiar sound of slamming flesh on metal.

“Elizabeth!? What’s going on!? Tell me exactly what’s going on?!” Push cried down the comms-stream with spit and fear.

“Don’t worry baby, don’t worry, be calm, close your eyes, baby, daddy will come, he’ll come, close your eyes, be a good girl.”

“Elizabeth, tell me, what!? Am I, oh my God, no! No!”

“It’s okay baby, quiet now. Push, just remember, we will always love you, you brought me so much happiness.” Elizabeth replied, stuttering as another mighty slam engulfed the room. Slow groans streamed through their connection. Miserably, gurgling, slime fuelled moans of the living dead.

“Daddy! Don’t let them hurt us daddy! I love you daddy! Where are you daddy!”

“No...no...n..n.no?”

“It’s okay Lilly, just sit here and close your eyes, we’re going to play a little game okay, you just close your eyes and hold your hands over your ears and sing, you can do that cant you? Good girl? Whoever can sing the loudest wins, okay honey? Okay?”

“Okay mummy, daddy, will you sing too? Where are you daddy? *Frère Jacques, Frère Jacques, Dormez-vous? Dormez-vous?*”

“That’s good, honey, just sit there now,” she shifted, the crash of glass shattering rattled through the comms-stream. “Get back you beasts, don’t you dare touch much child.”

“Elizabeth?”

Screams echoed as the sound of crunching bone and streaming flesh reverberated through all that were listening.

“Daddy, mummies hurt! Help us daddy, help us...”