

Ishanavi Dhiman

For THE PEOPLE, By THE PEOPLE



“8:30 am”. The hollow words with a robotic tone echoed in my skull, leaving a humming sensation before they faded.

I opened my eyes staring at the gray ceiling with white patches that hung above me, but I sat there motionless just like the mattress below me. It was 8:30 am which meant that by now only a scrape of cement hard bread and a half-boiled egg would be left for me to eat. Breakfast here at T-4330 closes by nine, and the kids, hungry for almost ten and a half hours lick away all the food by 8:30 and some even try to sneak away with loaves of bread to their respective rooms and when I say ‘try’, it never gets to

anything further than that. If the kid gets caught, which he or she always does, by the cafeteria staff their hours of being hungry are extended. The House of The Lords thinks that keeping the kids hungry every night would make them value the food and it wouldn’t be wasted.

The House of the Lords is the main head of the vicinity and they came up with the wonderful plan of making all the teenagers go to the “specially designed hostels” like T-4330. They treated teens like outcasts. The T stands for teen, 43 symbolizes the domain number and 30 is the strength of the hostel. The hostels, in fact, were anything but special.

“Stupid H.T.L, stupid rules,” I thought.

“You are not allowed to think about the Chamber of the Commons like that, it is a punishable offence, I will record it for the upcoming judgement.” My skull hummed from the A.I. mentor chip inside my head. Judgement, going up to a machine and getting yourself brainwashed was known as judgement.

It wasn't only me who had an artificial mentor inside her head, everyone else did too. It was their, the people's, decision. In 3000, new technology was made by the scientists which enabled one to have a sharp memory and a knack for solving mathematical problems at the cost of being committed to the H.T.L. by body and mind.

By 3010 everyone had gotten a chip embedded into their skulls and had laid open all of their precious thoughts bare in the hands of the Chamber of the Commons and by 3050 it was made compulsory to get a chip embedded. Yes, it helped getting many criminals arrested but at the loss of self-control, but people realised it too late.

“You should get up or I'll make you,” said my mentor.

I readily got up to avoid being manipulated by the machine. I cleaned up and went straight for the hall of T-4330.

“Ashmita! Wait up.” I heard Aaradhya say.

I stopped in my tracks to wait for her to catch up to me. “I didn't see you at the breakfast, thought maybe you were watching the donning ceremony,” she said.

“I slept in, wait! The donning ceremony, it is today?!” I said and a chill ran up my spine.

“Yes it is, let's go watch,” she said nervously.

Watch, that is the only thing that we can do. With time scientists found a way to cheat death temporarily by extending life by a mere 30-40 years. But there was a catch, it required a person to die for the person being resurrected to keep the population from overflowing. They always chose someone elderly one year and an outcast, a teenager, the other, and this time it was the misfortune of the teenagers, us teenagers. Which meant anyone from the hostels across the domains.

We entered the main hall to find the room filled to the brim with hostel residents. We made room for ourselves in the furthest corner of the room. I looked at the screen all the while tugging at my sleeves in nervousness. Finally, the warden, Miss Alison, a stern-looking lady in her mid-thirties, came in to switch on the projector. The screen lit up with a hum.

“YOU CAN SAVE THE UNIVERSE TOO,” said the man who appeared on the screen giving an advertisement about the 45th Cleanliness Campaign held in the exosphere.

They started it 45 years ago, to clean the space junk and haven't reached anywhere with it as there aren't many volunteers. The ad continued for about three minutes and then finally ended with the emblem of the H.T.L. flashing

on the screen. The screen displayed a well-lit rostrum with a woman behind it with a fishbowl in front of her on a table. The bowl contained our names.

“Welcome to the Donning Ceremony of 3050, sponsored by John Longfellow, THE RECEPTOR!”

Another rich man with a black goo covering his lungs, the cause of over consumption of cigarette and alcohol. The reason for the receptors to sponsor the Ceremony was tobacco or alcohol devouring their body.

The lady on the podium jabbered on for about 10-15 minutes before saying “Shall we begin?”

“It is going to be alright,” Aaradhya said.

“No, it's not,” I thought, only to be reminded by a minor headache to stop thinking. This was my mentor's way of giving me warnings. The lady put her hand in the bowl and shuffled the chits with her hand and pulled out one from the bowl.

I heard everyone in the room inhale sharply. The lady smiled and said, “Ashmita Prasad, congratulations you are our next Donner!”

No, my head started spinning, it became hard to breathe. The lady thrust the chit in the lens of the camera for everyone to see and sure enough it was my name printed on that piece of paper.

Everyone in the room, people to whom I wasn't even known, looked at me with grief and sympathy. Aaradhya started sobbing, “I'm sorry, so sorry,” she said.

“Why me?” I thought, is it because I insulted the H.T.L, that's what they deserve and I'll do it over and over again if I could.

At this thought, my headache grew and I started seeing black specs in my vision. The guards burst in through the doors to take me.

“No,” I said to myself and then to them, “No I will not go.” The guards were closing in, I couldn't run, I couldn't think.

“You must go,” my mentor said.

“No, I will not go against my will, no, no!” I started screaming and kicking at the guards. I fell to the floor limp, paralyzed.

My mentor had taken over my body, my mind. I couldn't protest, not anymore. Tears rolled down my face, one of the guards closed my eyes.

“I am marching to my death because of some brat who had the courtesy to smoke or drink a lot to be on the verge of dying, all because of some naive people's decision, this the future, 3050, an age of dystopian society.”

With this thought, I fell into darkness.

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