

Marcus awoke to the sound of his doorbell ringing. His eyes were struggling to stay open as he tried to discern whether he was still dreaming or not. The doorbell rang once more. Decidedly not.

He climbed regretfully out of bed, feeling the ache swelling in his head, waving in pulses, in syncopation with his heartbeat. He pulled on some grey track bottoms which had been lying on the floor for a while, and shook out a haggard white T-shirt, which was laden with stains and holes worthy of a Moth's feast worth.

A quick glance through the eyepiece as he unlocked the door. It was as he had expected, as he had feared. He reluctantly opened it to let the morning light flood in. The sun hung low behind 3 silhouettes which stood stiff, haloed by a golden outline. Marcus's eyes struggled for a second as the retinas burned uncomfortably in his eyes to adapt to the sudden brightness. Focused, he could now see the figures standing in front of him distinctly. Two suits on either side of the middle figure, clad all in black, one man, one woman, who appeared to serve more as a geometrical balance to the picture than anything purposeful. In the middle stood the third, who bore badges and medals.

Marcus's eyes were still squinted to keep focus. He reached behind him and pulled the door closed until it was ajar by only a mere crack. He did not want his impromptu guests to see inside. He was slightly embarrassed by the mess that had accumulated. Empty bottles and half eaten dinners littered the floor. The curtains were drawn regardless of the time of day now, and a thick haze of cigarette smoke had become a permanent feature to his abode. However despite that slight shame for lack of hygiene, really he just did not want anyone else inside his home, inside his life.

"Good morning Sergeant." exclaimed the middleman. Marcus groaned unwelcomingly at their presence. He did not want company from anyone, not for antisocial reasons, but because he felt that their presence could only be some unright justice. After all, it was him who had led his crew to that forsaken planet. It was him who had set foot on its ground and taken sample of the EC 104 bacteria. Little did he know that he would be immune to its effect. Little did he know that he was among the naught point eight percent of the planet's population to share that immunity. Little did he know that his wife and son did not benefit of the same immunity. Little did he know that they would succumb to its effect. Little did he know that this bacterium would bring such calamity to mankind, and eventually, end it.

Marcus shrugged at the thought of it. It was never far from his mind though. He reached into his back pocket and produced a small box,

from which he pulled out a cigarette. "Anyone got a light?" he asked. Almost immediately, the right hand man held a flame under Marcus's face. Marcus snapped awake, jerking his head back suddenly. When he saw that the right hand man was not trying to burn him, but simply providing an awkward light, Marcus moved in to spark the cigarette. He considered the right hand man for a second, and muttered a few words of condescent under his breath.

"Sergeant, you have been reactivated for duty and assigned a mission of utmost importance, effective immediately. To save our species from extinction in a time of dire need. As of this moment, with your training and the immunity you have against HC 104, you are the planet's most valuable asset. You will be briefed on the way to headquarters. Do you have any questions?" Marcus contemplated arguing, but with such immaculate delivery, he knew that the middleman had been ordered to not take "no" for an answer. Suddenly, Marcus knew what the other two were there for; leverage. He took a long drag from his cigarette, and looked up at the sky, to the stars. Invisible at day, but nevertheless there. Ever present. "Good. We leave immediately." said the man as he turned on his heel towards his blacked out car, his two guard dogs at his sides.

Marcus took a final drag from his cigarette and watched it as it dropped to the floor. Everything had suddenly slowed down. Weightless, timeless moments which would normally only last a split second now surrounded him as he began to think of how this had come to be. Everything that he had done so far had a knock on effect which lead him to this moment. First he had brought calamity to earth, and now he would save her from it.

He turned, clicked the door shut, and walked towards the vehicle which would take him to headquarters, towards his mission.