

## The Beginning of the End

Alex woke up with a start. A siren was blaring repeatedly. They rushed out of bed, stumbled down the stairs and opened the front door to look outside. The sky was on fire. As if on autopilot Alex slammed the front door and ran down to the basement. In the corner was a shape they hadn't noticed before, a rusty broken machine. All of a sudden there was a bright light and the whirring of motors.

The deteriorating metallic heap jolted into the figure of a life-size robot stretching out its tired limbs with a screech. The machine's eyes glowed with an eerie red flicker which illuminated the room discontinuously. In between each flicker Alex noticed a neon blue vapour oozing through the cracks in the wall. Alex tried to block their nose but it was too late, they could already taste the gas at the back of their mouth. They looked around and realised that the machine had vanished. In its place was a tattered piece of paper and on it the words "run while you can".

Before Alex could let out a scream, a gas mask was instantly placed over their face, and seconds later their whole body was hoisted into the air spontaneously. Kicking and screaming, Alex struggled in the grip of the assailant and twisted round to face what they realised was the life-sized robot. Alex hoped and hoped they were being taken to safety. Before they could decide if this was a hopeless hope or not Alex noticed the neon blue vapour was rising, changing into liquid and crystallising around their feet.

Climbing from the basement the mechanised courier carried Alex up from the crumbling stairs to the family office, the room they were forbidden to enter. On arrival the machine placed Alex down with a jerking motion. Dumb struck Alex froze still. The machine's limbs clicked and removed an old key from inside its metal chest. The robot pulled Alex towards the bookshelf and began searching. Alex reeled off a million questions all at once: "Why me? What does it want?"

"How much longer do I have?" Another click and the sound of books falling fixed Alex's attention to a door that only moments ago hadn't existed. A door leading to a passageway. A light leaked down the darkened walls, the smell of stone and mildew oozed its way into the office. Curiosity overtook fear. Alex stepped forward to look closer as the walls illuminated by the eerie light. Symbols chucked all over the walls. Alex stumbled and fell, pushed by metallic hands. The door slammed behind. Nothing but the dark, the stone, the robot and Alex's hope that lead to a better place.

Adjusting to the light Alex noticed endless equations and formulas chalked over every inch of the walls. No turning back, no escape, forced to walk a seemingly endless hallway with nothing but the dim light that radiated from the rusted warden behind them, Alex began to sob. To take their mind off the situation they once again turned to the writing on the wall. Curiosity turned back to fear as the chalk messages devolved into scratchings and engravings, formulas to ramblings, hopes to despair.

After what seemed like forever and also no time at all Alex found themselves stepping through an open door frame, pulled apart by the robot who was gesturing to enter, subservient as a butler to the guest of a manor. A burst of light blinded Alex

momentarily. In their readjustment out of the darkness Alex turned expecting to find their escort towering over them but instead found it standing silent and still, no sounds, no lights, no signs of life. The machine had shut down as if it's orders accomplished.

The open room was filled with the tools of science. Workbenches littered with papers, books, manuals, glassware and some strange unknown devices. Pipes, sockets and wires hung from the walls, some loosened by time while others seemingly unaffected. In the centre of the room was a giant tubular object, standing 3 meters tall. Curiously and cautiously moving towards it Alex saw a note stuck to the front of the frosted glass which prevented them from making out the tubes contents: "torture, agony..... this is all I deserve and from now on all I shall know."

Alex recognised the handwriting but couldn't remember where. They took a closer look and traced the letters with their finger. The letters smudged. The writing was fresh.

They were not alone.

#### Credit

The Beginning Of The End is an original short story co-created by Sharney, Lexi, Jack, Ian, Sam and Luca who are part of Unfolding Theatre's **Right Now People**.