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Workshop Submission #2

 My name is Aaron. I live in a dark and sinister city ruled by selfish, cruel, evil people who abuse and mistreat everyone I know. As I exited my apartment, I stepped out onto the sidewalk and immediately took in the putrid smell of smog. Walking down the boulevard I turned onto the street where my bus stop was, only to see it leaving. I cursed my bad luck and walked over to the bench and sat down, to wait for the next one. As I sat, I looked around at all the giant skyscrapers and complexes around me, disgusted. “This used to be a nice small town,” I looked over and saw that the voice had come from Jim. “Then they showed up and changed it all.”

 He was of course talking about the time before the invasion, when I was just a boy. This monstrous city, now containing millions of people had been but a simple town of thousands. The best word to describe it would have been harmless, just a small government with small industry and weak defenses. On my fifth birthday is when it all had happened. The Businessmen, as we called them, had invaded our small town with their large army and everything had changed. They had come in and subdued our military then established a new government and made us into one of their colonies. Now we had no contact with the outside of our city and almost no contact with others within, besides the people we worked with. All we had was a small phone with one number in it that we could use to call for “help.”

 I heard the distinct honk of the city bus as it stopped in front of me. Jim walked in and I followed. I took my usual seat at the back and stared out the window as we moved down the road. Building after building after building we passed and I couldn’t help but feel anger deep within. Ever since the invasion our town had become a city only known for manufacturing. Factories lined the outskirts of the city and more than seventy percent of the working class labored in them for long hours every day. It was to one of these factories that we were headed now. As the bus beeped and stated “Factory District” I looked back and saw everyone getting out. I waited for Jim to get up then I followed him out. As I stepped out of the bus I looked at the tiny shacks that filled the area around the factories. I saw the people living in them exit and couldn’t help but feel sorry for them. “Don’t feel sorry for the addicts” Jim said, noticing my expression. “It’s their own fault.” Most of the time I didn’t know how to feel about the addicts, they had been normal people like me long ago, before the invasion. When the Businessmen came in and had finished growing the town, they introduced a new drug onto the streets that their pharmacists had developed. We called it “Slave” because it gave you the want, no the need to work. It was said to be incredibly addicting, so much so that all the users of it did was work and sleep, they even used all of their wages to buy more of it.

 I entered Factory 23A and moved to my work station, ready to spend a few hours doing repetitive, monotonous tasks. As it usually did, my mind wandered and I began to think about the Businessmen. Despite their inhuman nature, they were quite smart about how they went about their work. It was rumored that they used colonies like ours to fuel their capital with resources, so everyone could live in extreme luxury. They used “Slave” to control part of the population and kept close watch on the rest of us to ensure that there would be no rebellion or revolt. Even if we were able to go around without being watched, the odds of a rebellion working were slim as they controlled all food and water rations for every citizen and seemed to have a massive stockpile of weapons and manpower at their disposal, not to mention all the unpredictable slave junkies who couldn’t even handle the notion of war.

 A loud buzzer sounded, time for lunch. I quickly walked over to the line forming in the back of the room. As I made it to the front of the line the woman behind the counter handed me a bag. I walked back to my work station as the timer on the wall counted down from 20:00. It was friday so we had five minutes more than the typical fifteen for lunch. I wolfed down my food and went back to work. This time my mind wandered to a different place. I thought about what I wanted and who I wanted to be. As a child I wanted to be a rancher. The small town I used to know needed a lot of them to produce food and it had always seemed like a fun job. Now that thought could only be a dream, however another idea had somehow wormed its way into my head. I thought about being a Businessman, having control over the city, a ruler in my own right. The thought pleased me so much that it began to scare me and I stopped thinking and just went back to my work. Another few hours passed until the final buzzer sounded and Jim walked over to me. “It’s Friday, want to go for a drink?” he asked.

“It’s not like we can go any other day”

“Now you’re talking.”

 We exited the factory and walked down the road until we got to the Commerce District. We walked into Marty’s Tavern and ordered a shot of whiskey. Jim looked at me, downing his shot and said “I’m getting tired of living here.”

I looked around to make sure no one was listening, “ Where else could we live”

“Dunno but it’s definitely time for a change”

I looked at him wondering what he had in mind, “Let's just have another drink.” And so we did, one after the other we drank and drank and drank then all of a sudden the world started to spin, then everything went black.

 I woke up head pounding. The tavern seemed to be just as I left it, except looking over, Jim was gone. I looked up at the bartender and asked him if he had seen Jim leave. He looked at me and said nothing. I got up, wobbly and shaking, and headed out the door. I looked up and down the street as the worry started to set in. No sign of him. I decided to check the bus stop, there would only been one every hour this late at night so he might just be there waiting. I ran all the way there, arriving light headed and with a strong need to vomit. Still no sign of Jim. Calm down, I told myself, no reason to panic, he must have just gone home, I will see him at work tomorrow. I knew I must have been worrying for nothing, but I couldn’t help but feeling like something had gone wrong. I hopped on the next but and walked back to my apartment.

I walked up to the door when suddenly I heard someone whisper my name. “Jim?” I asked loudly looking around me but seeing no one.

“Over here” The voice whispered.

I looked behind me and saw a shadow in the alleyway between two apartments.

“Who are you?” I asked the silhouette.
“I know where your friend Jim is.” The shadow answered.

I tentatively walked into the alleyway until I was face to face with the man. He had the look of a normal worker, nothing remarkable about him.

“Follow me” he said quietly running off down the alleyway.
As I followed, many thoughts ran through my mind. I had never seen this man before despite knowing most of the people living in my sector. He seemed normal, but why did he know where Jim was and why did he know I was looking for him. The more I thought about it the stranger it seemed to get. As we wormed our way through the back alleys of the sector my thoughts began to intensify, I had to learn more about this person. I stopped walking abruptly and the man turned back and looked at me.

“We must hurry” he told me.
“Who are you, where are we going?” I questioned.

“Your friend Jim needs our help” he said, avoiding the questions.

“I’m not moving until I get answers” I responded, my head becoming clearer with the effects of the alcohol wearing off.

 The man’s frown slowly changed to a smirk. “Very well” he said, my name is Tobias, I am employed by the Businessmen to keep order behind the scenes of this city, and your friend Jim has put himself in a very dangerous position. I immediately backed away,

“Why should I trust you? You work for them”

“We all work for them, you understand that better than anyone. If you want your friend Jim to survive, you had better just follow me.”

Reluctantly I started back towards the man and we continued on our way. “How did you get this job” I asked him.

He laughed “You could say I was born into it.”

“What do you mean?”

“My village used to be much like yours, except instead of making us all work in factories, they take all the newborns and have them raised into mindless spies. I just like all of my brothers, a simple shadow reporting information until I learned the truth thanks to him.”

This was too much for me to handle, “him, who is him?” I asked perplexed.

He laughed again “ you really don’t know much do you? Jim. Jim caught me spying and showed me the truth.”

“Jim? Jim is just a normal guy” I said unsure of what I thought to be reality just a day ago.

“Jim is no ordinary man, he is going to rescue this place”

“So you are some sort of double agent now?” I asked still confused.

“Look, this isn’t some sort of movie, we need to get to Jim.”

We arrived at the end of a long alley and I noticed we were in a district that I had never been in, The Business District. I was struck with immediate fear. The only people who ever went near the Business District were the addicts when they had worked so hard that they became too injured to continue. It was said that when that happened they simply walked to the hospital in the district and allowed the doctors to harvest any valuable organs before submitting themselves to death. “We aren’t supposed to be here” I murmured, but Tobias didn’t pay any attention. He ran to the gate and entered something into a keypad and the gate swung open.
“Let's go” he whispered and ran in. I followed him reluctantly. “Wait here” he said as we approached a small building. As he ran into the building I realized that despite him answering my questions, I still had no idea what was happening. I started to get angry. I was tired of being in the dark and following orders. This man despite his story and the situation was no better than a Businessman, using me. I took the phone out of my pocket and dialed the only number in it. As it rang I thought to myself “at least like this I have control, I know who will be on the other side of this call, but maybe I can make this work out.”

“What is the emergency?” I heard from the phone in a robotic voice.

“I think I am with a traitor to the city” I said nervous. A second passed then I heard a human voice, “Where are you?”

It hasn’t had the time to locate the call. “Business district in front of a small gray building.” The call ended. Worried I waited in silence, then I saw lights and a vehicle approached. A man in a suit approached.

“Follow me.” He ordered.

I could tell I shouldn’t argue so I followed them into the building. As we entered the room I saw nothing out of the ordinary, just cubicles and computers. We went up to the first flight of stairs and the man entered the room. Suddenly I heard two gunshots. I ran into the room and saw Tobias on the floor, one hole in his chest and one in his head.

The man turned to me “Where is Jim” he asked.

Confused I looked at him “How do you know Jim? How does everyone know Jim?”

The man smiled and turned to inspect the body. He was searching Tobias’ clothing when a loud noise came from the floor above.
“Follow me” The man said again as he headed towards the stairs.
I followed him and when he entered the room I heard another two gunshots this time followed by a scream of pain. I entered the room and saw Jim on the floor. I held back the urge to vomit seeing that both of his legs had been shot. He looked at me and his expression changed from one of pain to one of sadness.

“I’m sorry Aaron” he said as the man walked up to him and struck him in the back of the head, knocking him out cold.

“You’ve done well” the man said looking at me. “You’ve earned yourself a reward.” He approached me and suddenly I felt cold metal strike me, and once again the world went black.

As my eyes opened I was in total darkness. I tried to get up but my legs and arms were strapped to the floor. A large light above me turned on and I looked and saw that I wasn’t attached to the floor but to an operating table. A man approached me, dressed in a lab coat and smiling.
“Where am I?” I asked.

“You are in the hospital, you are going to receive your reward.” The man said chuckling as he picked up a syringe full of a bluish liquid.

“What is that?” I asked worried.

“It’s CDVS 13, or as you know it ‘Slave’.”

“No, please” I shouted, but it was too late and all I could do was scream as he stabbed the needle into my arm.