

2136 — A Post-Apocalyptic Novel
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Sample Chapter: (1889 words)

I awoke to a world of chaos and darkness.

I was on the floor of one of the bio labs along with a case of glass vials full of REZ 3 serum. *I don't remember falling.* As I maneuvered around the fragile vials full of blue anti-aging elixir, I made sure to avoid the ones that had broken and were leaking onto the white tile.

Wiping the shards of broken glass off my white lab coat, I had to shield my eyes from the bright red floodlights flashing overhead. The dull echo in my eardrums muffled out the words on the intercom. *What had happened?*

I knelt with my fingers pushing on my ears and managed to block just enough of the deafening blaring to hear the female robotic voice broadcasting over the SEN. *Secure Emergency Network.*

'This is not a drill. There has been a breach in the system's stations. Please make your way to your designated evacuation pod for muster with your MO specialist. I repeat, this is not a drill.'

The Automated Recall Computer's (ARC) emergency broadcast was on a two-minute loop. In an unlikely instance of an emergency, the system would automatically upload emergency protocol and issue an evacuation. *I guess an emergency was more likely than they thought.* My mind was spinning over the words. *The system's stations were down? What did that even mean? Like, off? Or, inoperable? And if they were down, what good would Mission Ordinance do?* I grabbed the nearest operating table and pulled myself to my feet.

I felt a surge of pain in my kneecaps as they squished into some of the broken glass. Luckily, it didn't draw blood. I squinted through the flashing red to make

out the features of the room. I fumbled through the dark with one hand on the wall, another outstretched before me. The crimson hue was useless. Every few seconds when the siren light would spin I'd be blinded all over again, while my night vision fought to adjust to the pitch black. This was an endless cycle of insanity while I blindly guided my way around the room toward the door. I felt a pressure on the back of my head and thought one of the machines was jabbing me, but as I went to brush it away my hand made contact with a fleshy substance. My teeth bit down into my lip from the sudden pain. I could taste the bitter iron in my mouth and spit the blood into the darkness. The object pushing on my skull was no object at all, rather, the insides of my brain desperately trying to free itself from my skull.

My very own parasite clawing its way out its pancreatic sac in search of its next host.

The grapefruit-sized swell protruding from my matted hair felt sticky and moist. And, tender—very, very tender, and fresh. The pus adhered my fingers together with its foggy membrane.

The moment my head went above my knees my body summersaulted sideways with the rush of blood. I lost all motor functions in an instant and went tumbling into the wall. A sharp pop jolted my shoulder, and the socket immediately started throbbing. A sudden wave of vertigo launched me to my knees a second time. I barely leeches my hands along the cool rim of the wastebasket before my stomach fulfilled its safety protocol when a contagion entered the body. I saw the dark black letters *Hazardous Materials* illuminate red when the flashing red sirens blared overhead. I raised my face from the depths of death, leaving a competent pool of oral excrement in my wake. I used the sleeve of my lab coat to wipe the grit from my lips. *Thank God I had emptied it the night before.*

The Easy Make Egg curdled at the bottom of the grey plastic as I cleared my senses with several steady breaths. With the support of one of the nearby walls, I oriented myself against its stability to fend off the whiplashes of vertigo that threatened to send me to my knees a second time. I inched my way slowly

along the wall towards the door leading out of the lab, my hand never leaving its smooth surface.

In my nauseating whirlwind I tripped over something clunky on the floor, and smacked my forehead into the table. White specks floated into existence with every rapid blink. I gripped the leather cushion on the table and hauled wobbly feet under me. Through the red flashing I saw the body. The clot in my throat returned, and had I not just emptied my stomach of its breakfast, I would have vomited again. My wrist rattled over my mouth as I tried to hold back the gagging escapade emitting like a chained rodent, and the shrilling gasps as I tried to maintain a steady breathing.

Three seconds later the floodlights lit upon the numbers *100* embroidered on the chest of the white shirt he wore. I tried my best to ignore the rotting tissue falling away from his cheekbone and the white pus leaking from both eye sockets. Let's just say, number *100* had not fared well during trials. Nor had the others.

Volunteer 100 - Terminated.

Number 100 had been the most promising of the volunteers administered the serum. In the first 24 hours the subjects were in a calm state. Vitals were normal and improving. As was expected. Within 36 hours the skin had regained its elasticity and color in each of the subjects. After 52 hours, they were up and moving, full of energy, and healthy; a younger version of themselves. Some exhibited signs of age resistance and reversal as significant as fifty years! Preliminary data revealed the serum had worked better than we could have imagined. All 99 of the volunteers had no signs of their actual old age. BioTic had solved the problem of death. The volunteers were proof that the ravaging effects of age could be reversed.

Then everything changed.

At 75 hours, our optimism was dashed to pieces as numbers *1* through *23* collapsed; their bodies spasmed on the floor until the muscles stopped twitching. Each one had died within the first two minutes of

the onslaught of the seizures. Numbers 24 through 87 were holding strong—muscles, tissues, tendons, and neuron activity all reactivating and reproducing at exponential rates.

At 107 hours, all were lying in puddles of their own blood and erupted organs. Their eyes had burst, ears oozed hardened, yellow pus, and their muscles had dislocated completely from their bones, or snapped in half entirely.

In a desperate attempt to counteract the adverse side effects, numbers 88 to 99 were quarantined in the cryogenic chamber and pumped full of nitrogen to slow the blood cells from regenerating. All died similar deaths in their solitary confinement chambers later that night. Their vitals had skyrocketed just before taking a nosedive. Within two minutes they went from healthy, fully-functional younger images of their former selves to vibrating carcasses castrated on the cold, hard floor with their intestines hanging from their mouths and eyes, black blood everywhere. The stench reminded me of dying fish.

Their lifespans crossed the peak of 200 hours before relapse and total bodily shutdown. All 99 were wheeled off to the infirmary for incineration. With the anti-aging serum still in test trials, BioTic couldn't risk an outbreak to the rest of the crew and inhabitants onboard Proc 1.

I had lost all hope of breaking the genetic code for the REZ 3 serum, until I met number 100. Something within me felt different the first time I shook his hand. He was calm, quiet, and strangely indifferent. He felt like the missing puzzle piece to an impossible equation of DNA strands and chromosomes. I don't know what it was, but I just knew, in my heart of hearts, that he was the key to breaking the code.

The quad-cycle computers ran the calibrations for a week before I felt confident enough that the results were valid. Chromosome 13 was flagged as the faulty speck believed to be causing the reversal of the anti-aging serum. Instead of returning the youthfulness back to the host, and stabilizing, their bodies reverted back to Nature's natural cycle, except now at 1,000 times the rate.

REZ 3 worked initially, but after 24 hours the outcome was fatal. Each volunteer had rapidly aged and then died as a direct result of elevated cell degeneration.

In laymen terms, all 99 volunteers had died of old age.

So much for the anti-death magic elixir I had thought.

My vision returned to normal as I continued to stare down at the last of the willing subjects to volunteer for the program. *Why did he have to die too?* My mind raced back to the last dose I had administered to him two weeks prior. During his daily checkup, his vitals had looked good and were holding. And yet, he had died too less than a few hours earlier. ARC came back over the intercom shattering my reclusive dream. I wished it were all a dream.

'System's machines have failed. Propulsions 1, 11, 19, and 21 have failed. Proc 1 has lost all power in the main thrusters. Prepare for impact. I repeat, Proc 1 is going down.'

What! My back was violently jerked to the side and smashed into the adjacent wall. The dead body of number 100 slid on top of me. His puffy, blank eyes glared down at me. When the floodlights shown again, number 100's features spurred curiosity within me. There were no visible signs of death. His eyes hadn't burst, his ears weren't bleeding, and there was no evidence he had had a seizure. With his body lying on my abdomen, I squeezed my hand out from under him and felt for a pulse. I waited for ten seconds—hopeful.

ARC made me jump as her static voice blared through the intercom.

'All stations must evacuate to their designated areas IMMEDIATELY! Systems are critical. Make your way—'

ARC went out in a gurgle of static. I felt Proc 1 rattle beneath me as the engines strained against the weight of the ship. With power lost to the propulsion tubes, there was no way the backup generators could compensate for that amount of wattage. *We were going down.*

Number *100* shot to the ceiling with a sudden whip. His head snapped to the side and hung there crooked. I soon joined him against the ceiling. I hung weightless for the next several seconds as my body floated in midair. The broken vials of REZ 3 and the purple substance within their sealed glass bodies hovered all around me like sharp bubbles ready to burst. My eyes shifted to number *100*. *Had he just blinked?* I had my gaze locked on his face when my body lurched back to the ground well before I ever heard the recoil of the explosion

Number *100*'s limp frame landed beside me, our eyes inches from one another. The back of my head burned and my fingers tingled. The room faded in and out as I struggled to remain conscious. Just before the world returned to black, I saw his eyes twitch open and look at me.

He was alive!