

Creative Writing

“The Disease”

(Short story – 800 words)

By Lachlan Smith

What if by trying to create the perfect world we instead end up turning society upside down and starting a war with the natural environment? This bleak future is seen through the eyes of a man living an average night in a corporate-fuelled future ‘super city’ which is patrolled by robots and automated transport systems. On this one night, like every other evening, he must rush home in order to meet the safety-imposed curfew. If he hesitates, he will be forced to fight for his life against an angry planet.

Title: "The Disease"

The soft neon glow reflects off the large dark corporate buildings towering above me as I head towards the subway rail entrance. The soft tapping of liquid falling from above is hitting the steps as my boots collide with each stair on the way down. The melancholic humming of advertising bots and air vents overhead provide the only signs of life as I walk towards the toll booth.

"One way trip to the East Junction," I mumble.

"That's forty dollars for the hyper-rail to East Junction sir, please allow me to scan your wrist and grant you entrance," says a robotic voice as I lay my wrist down on the bench. The red laser slowly glides over as if it were a wave slowly washing over my skin.

"Robert John Smith you are clear to enter, remember curfew will be in effect in the next forty-five minutes so please get home soon. Thank you and have a wonderful night."

I move into the empty waiting area, the only lone soul in line. I check my watch as it reads **11.25pm - 09/02/2045**. "Thirty-five minutes until curfew, argh," I sigh. A slow chime begins to sing from a speaker as a blue light starts penetrating the dark tunnel. I slowly walk forward to the dotted edge as the hyper-rail glides up in front of me. The train is silent as it comes to a slow halt and the white doors with cracked windows slowly grind open. I step inside to take a seat. The doors beep as they close slowly with a soft thud and a voice comes over the intercom; "Last trip to East Junction is now in effect."

I notice a thin layer of dust covering the cabin floor as a single voice breaks the silence further down. A man is sitting staring at the floor in business attire as he seems almost lifeless, only blinking occasionally and muttering unintelligible words. Another broken soul in this broken world.

I watch out the window as the rail car shoots forward at blistering speed. Streaks of light inside the tunnel flickering as we pass, when suddenly we pitch up and emerge from the subway to the above ground rail system. The towering buildings all tied together with beams and walkways lit up like Christmas trees with pointless advertisements as the dark swirling sky above grows angry. "We thought we could control the weather, what fools," I say to no one.

A green light switches on above the door as a voice comes over the intercom for a final time; "we have reached East Junction, time is 11.45. Thank you."

The doors slide open as I and the other passenger step out and begin to walk in opposite directions. I begin my walk down the sheltered stairway and onto my street as the warning sirens begin to resonate throughout the city. I check my watch to see the time is now 11.55pm. "Christ, I need to get home!"

Headlights begin to round the corner ahead of me and the next thing I know a police car with lights on glides towards me. The lights blind me as it flashes towards me and parks abruptly next to the sidewalk.

"You have four minutes to get inside before a major weather system blows the fortnightly gusts overhead sir. Get home now or where it is safe." An automated voice reads the warning, and as soon as it was there it was gone again speeding down the empty streets. I quickly round my corner and walk inside my apartment complex as a slight breeze begins to sing on the outside walls.

I begin my journey up to the third floor as the breeze grows stronger with every step I take. It is getting to the point where it's becoming overbearing and screaming at the walls. The door creaks open as I enter, and I take a seat on the couch. The windows are whining now as dust is blasted with insane velocity from the outside wind. The visibility is reduced to nothing but the slight glow of buildings outside. A radio drones on in the background, "...ever since the instruments were implemented to control our failing weather... great velocity and speed... we've just done more damage..." Only a few words are audible over the static.

I stare into the void of dust and glow as if it were the world's final angry stand against humankind, against the disease at which we are. The only selfish species to drive the world into our own terraformed hell, and yet it could have been so different.