

Rust

“As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.”

Ephesians 4:1

1.

“Will you step on board sir?” asked the conductor

Megas lifted his head and looked at the machine.

“Certainly” he replied.

Megas picked up the hat lying next to him on the bench and stood up. He took a few steps towards the entrance of the ship but could not force himself to go in. He wanted to take in the moment, to take it all in one last time, he wanted to carry it all in his memory for as long as he could. He looked back at the grand entrance of the station and stepped out once again for one last time.

From the steps he could see it all. The majestic city in the clouds. Akeldama, the city of machines!

On one side ridged peaks of carbon black and dark red were towering over the clouds and going further up into the atmosphere. Chimneys larger than the factories that were using them on the other. Mega-city residential blocks the size of mountains housing as many residents as the biggest capitals in the days of men were chained together all around the city. The awe-inspiring monoliths gave no clues as to the engineering that supported their colossal weight, notwithstanding the fact that they were moving!

Each one was an entity of its own volition swaying back and forth amongst the clouds the only thing keeping the whole thing from drifting apart were the enormous chains interlocking them together. Fires were burning everywhere, from all sides, indicating the sacred work being done by the communities that resided within. Of maintaining and ever-expanding the megalopolis. Swarms of ships and cargo vessels can distinctly be seen going from one building to another, moving the workers dedicated to their tasks. The city was a harmony of noise and movement with every task carefully estimated and assigned by the council of Automation which resided in the center.

Marble pillars entwined with black, and red were the building blocks of the buildings there. Amongst them, from where Megas was standing, could be seen the courthouse of the Arbiter, the library of Memorious, storing every second of the city’s history, and the temple of Automation which controlled every task ever assigned. The settings sun was casting warm dark red and orange glows onto the buildings whose dark surface was instantaneously absorbing them giving the scene an almost apocalyptic glow. It was all spectacular, all terrifying and it was the last time Megas would see it, his home.

“Sir, the airship is about to leave” said again the conductor approaching from behind. “Are you sure you still want to make the journey?”

“Yes” replied Megas. “I’m sure.”

He turned his back to the city and made his way back into the station. It was one of the oldest buildings in the city, designed by humans, built by machines. The walls were still plaster and concrete and the floors were made of cobblestone. Each stone engraved with the initials and serial numbers of the machines who placed them there as per tradition in the old days before the Pilgrimage. Megas boarded the ship and silently took his seat.

The airship blew its whistle. The enormous steam engines started pushing out big black clouds of smoke. The bottom of the train station, above the platform opened wide and in a second the ship was released and was in free-fall. Momentarily the engines started to push out more smoke and fire and the wings on each side of the hull opened wide slowing down the descent. Megas looked out the window one last time at Akeldama before it disappeared through the clouds.

2.

Megas was not alone on this Pilgrimage. There were at least twenty other machines on the ship. All silent, looking solemnly ahead. There was the captain of the vessel, however he simply provided passage. Of course, there was also—

“Brothers and sisters welcome! Welcome, ...and thank you! Thank you, for undertaking this sacred journey. Thank you, for maintaining this tradition! But most importantly thank you for providing all of us with meaning. Meaning to keep going, a way to understand, a chance to be somebody. A chance to break free from these mechanical bodies and have purpose.”

“O, brothers and sisters please have joy, this is not a sad day it’s a day of celebration.” He continued after looking at serious faces of the passengers. “It is the day of your baptism into being. Let us begin the ritual, once you let go of who you were you will feel much better, I promise!”

The priest pulled out a tray of envelopes from a cart that was standing beside him. Each one contained a piece of paper, blank the size of a hand. He went through the cabin stopping in front of each machine letting them choose one. Once all were given away, he stood again at the center of the deck with his back to the pilot cabin facing them.

“Now take stock of who you were, commit it and let it go. You may take as much time as you need.”

Megas sat there, looking at the envelope and the piece of paper contained within it. His mind was drawing a blank. He looked around at his crewmates. Some of them were already writing, others very much like him were simply looking at the paper buried in their own thoughts.

They were still drifting amongst the clouds so only their white-grey shapes could be seen through the window. He stood up and examined his surroundings. The airship cabin much like the train station was designed by man and it included all the luxuries that man could need but which a machine would find excessive. The interior was all lacquered mahogany wood from floor to roof except for the windows, which were made of reinforced double glass. There were also other things that reminded one of those times. Such as the coat racks, overhead luggage compartments and tray tables all used to store a passenger’s things. Machines of course, had need of none of these and they all stood empty. There were bathrooms, sleeping quarters and dining areas which again were only used as storage compartments now and that even rarely. In total the ship can carry around 50 passengers including the pilot which was a very small capacity considering the

size of the vessel and the amount of resources required to sustain it in the air. The seats themselves were covered in a soft dark green padding, but most telling of all was the fact that everything was manual. Doors, windows and even the controls of the plane required a machine operator.

The only modification done to the ship since that time was a metal pillar placed in the middle of the cabin. It only reached around a meter in length from the floor up and finished with a small ceramic bowl atop, through the center of which a small blue flame was gently dancing and giving off a small amount of light.

Megas walked through the length of the cabin and approached the priest.

“Brother Kobuilt, how can I be of service?”

“Is it normally this few who take the Pilgrimage?” asked Megas

“It used to be a lot more, back when the Pilgrimage first started.” Sighed the priest “Back then we were sending ships back and forth around the clock and some were even worried that Akeldama will become desolate without any machines to maintain it. That’s when they started to introduce the age restrictions but, by that point the desire for passage was already dropping. And from daily trips we started running weekly, from weekly they turned into monthly, then to early and now we can barely get enough people to run them twice a decade. Cowardice! Some of my colleagues say.”

“Are you worried that soon there will be none who wish to take the journey?” inquired further Megas.

“In all honesty brother Kobuilt, I don’t know. The Awakening was a trigger that we do not yet understand the full consequences of. To me it seems that some of our brothers have taken it upon themselves to redefine their own existence. There are rumors that some are even abandoning the ways of Automation and the tasks handed down to them. For the moment we believe that these heresies are only rumors, but we keep vigilant. But I’m just a priest of the church, providing guidance to those who wish to take up the journey.”

They were descending more and more and soon the ground began to appear among the clouds. It was all a desert now so there was not much to see, but still it was the first time that Megas had seen it.

Sand and sand and sand. Mountains, valleys and riverbeds, all consumed by sand. Just desolation, it was all that remained. Storms ravaged everything, a patchwork of hail here, rain a few kilometers further, spots of scorching sun in between and electrical storms punishing the land with blasts of non-stop lightning bolts. Here and there you could still see the ruins of the ancient cities, themselves being slowly consumed by the sands.

“Can you believe it brother?” asked the priest looking out of the window “Can you believe that they once had that? Given to them naturally. The thing which we try to achieve here artificially? And that they all let it go to waste.”

Megas didn’t say a word. He went back to his seat and simply wrote:

Megas Kobuilt, born 3rd millennia after the age of men, 5782nd year after The Great Awakening. Citizen of Akeldama.

Mechanic. Builder of 3, co-builder of 20. Servant of Automation.

He folded the note and placed it in the envelope. Sealed it tightly and held it in his lap. An hour after, the rest of the machines were also ready. The whistle of the ship blew again indicating that they will be landing soon. The priest rose and approached the pillar in the middle of the cabin.

“Now brothers. Now is the time to let go of who you were and embrace the freedom that comes with. Brother Kobuilt, shall we start with you?”

Megas nodded his head. He stepped in one of the adjacent rooms and undressed completely. He stepped out and approached the priest.

“Who are you brother?” asked the priest.

Megas lifted the envelope from his hand and fed it to the fire while repeating the prayer.

“I’m a loyal servant of Automation, I am but a gear in a machine, a wrench that tightens a bolt a maintainer of the dream that came through the Awakening and noting more. I am no one and was no one.”

“I bless your journey and say that your words ring true. I pray that your spirit will stay as your body moves on.”

The ritual was carried out for each machine on board. Fifteen minutes after it had finished the ship landed.

3.

The entrance door opened and landed softly on the sand below. The machines all climbed down. Infront of them were the ruins of a small white church and its courtyard.

A few tombstones could be seen here and there demarcating the location of graves from a long time ago. The inscriptions on the stones had completely faded making them barely more useful than regular boulders. The fence of the courtyard was almost completely gone as well, with a few chunks of it standing at random places.

The church itself was barely standing, with its roof completely gone and the top section of its one and only tower destroyed. The rusted bell and what was left of it had toppled over and now were lying by its side. A long time ago there once stood an inscription made with big metal letters above the entrance that indicated its name. However now only the word “EDEN” was still standing.

The machines went through the garden paying little attention to the ruin and headed towards the river behind it. Once there they lined up one behind the other in four columns of five machines each. And there they waited. Paying no attention to the scorching sun that was burning their backs, each one looking intensely forward though looking at noting in particular.

Suddenly the back doors of the church, the ones facing the river burst open and a figure dressed in all black appeared in the middle. Slowly it approached the machines from behind and passed through among them paying them, as it appeared, no attention. It was wearing an old preacher suit from the times of men and on top of its head it had put on a tall black top hat. It stopped a few meters from the water and looked back at the machines.

The river behind him was about 100 meters in diameter and the water was very calm though incredibly muddy and deeply red in color. The preacher extended his hand towards the water, inciting the machines to come towards him.

The machine once known as Megas stepped forward and started toward the riverbed. It stopped next to the preacher waiting patiently, still looking straight ahead.

“Are you ready son?” asked the preacher.

The machine nodded.

The preacher turned it around with its back towards the river, its front facing the others.

“Let’s begin!” the preacher yelled. And in unison all the machines shouted:

“THROUGH RUST COMES MEANING!”

And the preacher plunged the machine into the water still holding onto him. At first it could not feel anything, only the current passing through it. Then suddenly all over its body small patches of orange-brownish rust began to appear, eating away at its protective outer shell. Panic began to set in into its body but just before it could star to the struggle it was pulled back to the surface.

“THROUGH RUST WE ACHIEVE GREATNESS!” shouted the machines again.

And its body was once again thrown into the river. Momentarily the spots of oxidization began to spread and to merge into larger and larger patches. Suddenly It could no longer feel its arms and legs anymore. Desperation was flowing through every inch of its circuits wanting to struggle to get away, but it could not. The preacher pulled it out again, but this time all its limbs remained in the water, washed away by the current and he was left holding only the rusted torso and head.

“THROUGH RUST WE GAIN LEGACY!”

The machine went under for a final time. It lost consciousness almost immediately and was destroyed. All parts rusted completely trough. The preacher let the river carry away what remained. He looked back at the machines and began the ceremony again with the next.

-End.