Monster

“10,” I said, and the 9 8 7 6 part never happened. When I woke up two days later, the 9 was still in my head.

There was little pain involved. Having been in pain for decades, a little open-skull surgery didn’t add much to the mix. With my drip-line and my panic button, I felt well-taken-care-of, and for the first few days I just stayed stoned and quiet. It was too soon to look for results, so I didn’t, just silently rode a slow wave in and out of lucidity. After a week, boredom had begun to creep in around the edges; I took that as a good thing, but by the end of week two, I was running out of lying-around energy, and beginning to think of rude things to say to the staff. On day 15, Dr. Penrose unbolted my head from the frame, and I sat up. You wouldn’t think sitting up was such a big deal. It was like changing planets.

Penrose was a funny guy. Not funny ha-ha, just strange in a way I would have had a very hard time describing. I know him better now, of course, and he’s nothing like he used to be, but back then he was a mad scientist wannabe, without the crazy laugh. He obviously cared deeply what became of me, but I didn’t know whether it was because he had to, or because he just did. Humans didn’t seem like his natural companions. Of course, they weren’t.

My name is Victor. I’m not telling you that because you don’t already know; everybody knows me now. It’s just my way of reminding you that I belong to your species. I never liked the name, not being a victor of anything in life by any stretch of the imagination, and not comfortable with the romanish martial sound of it, but it was given to me by a mother I once had, with the most honest and loving of intentions. The stories about me almost never mention that I had a mother for twelve years, unless it’s to suggest that somehow my condition (meaning me) was responsible for her death. It wasn’t, but even if it had been, how would that have been my fault?

Here’s what you need to know about me: I have never been to school, I have never had a woman, I have never done a day’s work, and I have never owned a thing I couldn’t carry or wear. I wouldn’t hurt a fly, I would give you the shirt off my back, and I have been directly responsible for the deaths of hundreds, or even thousands, of fully-formed human souls. I will be responsible for the deaths of even more before I am done, both directly and indirectly. A war will be fought over my legacy, and I will die in it, sooner or later. The events I was fated to set in motion will occur now with or without my physical presence on this earth, and there is nothing you or I can do about it now. God has rolled the dice.

It is without pride, malice or regret that I reflect on my status as the most-wanted criminal of all time. It is a side-effect of my agenda, and I choose not to dwell on it. I am hated, feared and hunted by all sides but my own, but I know that within the ten billions who populate this place there are hundreds of millions who love me, even revere me (I wish they wouldn’t), and who would protect me with their lives. The ranks of my hidden armies deepen day-by-day, as the change comes upon each in his or her turn. What Penrose and I started will have its inevitable conclusion within the century, and nothing will ever be the same.

I am sorry for the great misery I have caused. I would do it all again if I had to.

The months after the surgery were, literally, the best days of my life. In retrospect, the reasons are obvious, but at the time, all that mattered was the golden freedom of life without seizures. I didn’t really understand what Penrose had done to me (I’ll explain it in a little while), but I didn’t care yet either. To pass entire days and weeks without waking up spasming on the floor in a pool of my own ejecta was all that mattered. To live without the screaming pain inside my skull, the constant feeling of pressure building in my reptile brain…it was not just the best time of my life, it was my first life. I did the exercises, strengthened an almost destroyed body, enjoyed the food and air of the underfunded mental hospital as if it was the food and air of Olympus. For half a year, I lived an idyll.

At seven months, the change began. It was not a sudden thing; it was like staring at a wall for a long time and then suddenly noticing that the bricks had changed places.