

It's been years since I've seen the Earth's crust, with its green rolling hills and soft-spoken mountains. I am more accustomed to the suffocating navy of the ocean than the golden rays of sunlight which used to bless the Earth in The Before. Humanity failed Mother Nature, and She in turn failed us. I have longed to emerge from the blanket of blackness that is the sea, and now I have to. I am dying.

It's painful to think of The Before. The days melted into weeks down here, and with that I lost my concept of time. Days mingled with hours and minutes slow danced with months. My thoughts used to roam to my life, the one I had before The Surge. Thoughts of my family filtered through a trickle of my consciousness until I turned off the tap, quickly becoming too painful to remember. Plans I had for my future also slipped away, prophesying my children's graduations, their marriages, growing old with my wife. I am but a shell of a man in a submarine.

The During took the last of my sanity. All I am able to remember about the last evening with my family was spending it trying to ignore the screams of those who were drowning. The preparation for the unknown also drained me. Packing the submarine with necessities. Looking my wife in her eyes as I whispered goodbye; embracing my children for the last time. The heartache that followed was the worst part; I wish I could have taken them with me.

The Surge, which was to end in a 'couple weeks' said the media, made BeniTech panic. They sent submarines and five years worth of rations with bioengineered plants to keep their corporate leaders alive. Only the leaders. I will never forget my wife's face when I explained to her that I had to go alone. BeniTech said the submarine project was also to test the plants and how long they will produce oxygen. With the rations reduced to crumbs weeks ago and the last plant on its deathbed, I believe I have successfully concluded their research project.

First I noticed the wilting, then the foul stench, and evidently one morning I looked in the mirror and noticed my lips had turned a faint tinge of blue.

I knew sooner or later I would have to emerge, but the idea of breaching the inky blanket of the sea felt unreal. Dying of hunger in a submarine became a thought my brain welcomed.

The cockpit of the submarine had never entertained me for long. There were four controls: A large red button marked 'Emerge', a small digital map of the world with a blinking dot for my location, a radar, and an unmarked keyhole. Oddly, I never found the key.

I programmed the submarine to travel close to the East Coast of America. By how quickly the initial Surge was, I predicted the water would at least be up to the new 'East Coast' of America: Colorado.

My travel for the past two days roughly tracked U.S. interstate 40. The amount of debris was appalling. Houses, trees, wood, and the amount of dead bodies was enough to make anyone sick. Old people, young people, infants, cats, dogs, floating, half decomposed for miles. I scanned the faces I could see for a hope of familiarity, even so I saw nothing but lengthy decomposition and hollowed eye sockets.

I wouldn't have been able to make it all the way to the mountains. I would have to stop before I ran out of oxygen.

I stumbled over to my bunk, trying to catch my breath. There was no dinner tonight, I had eaten the last of it weeks ago. As I fell asleep I pondered: If I fell, would I wake up?

I did. With a crick in my neck and a numb lump in my stomach.

It was easily noon when I awoke, the debris had more shape and texture to them. I checked the map; I was on the edge of Kansas. I then went to go sit by the plant. My lungs heaved; a leaf fell. We both were dying.

I made a difficult decision, by nightfall I will rise to the surface. I need oxygen; I'm going to die.

The hours loitered.

The minutes dragged their feet.

The seconds lollygagged behind.

Thousands of small shaky breaths later, it was night. The sea has returned to its original inky color. I ambled to the cockpit and finally pressed the button I have been begging myself to press for five years.

*Emerge.*

The submarine began to rise fairly quickly, and I grabbed the wall for support. The only way out was a small circular hatch at the top of the cockpit. I grabbed the latch 30 feet until surface level.

Twenty.

Fifteen.

Ten.

Five.

One.

I began to twist, my fingers slipped and fumbled over the slippery metal hatch. I begged the door, negotiating in exhausted tongues. *A budge? Please? Let me breathe? Let me taste the air on my lips. Let me live.*

The seal broke, the hatch groaned like a beast awakening after a long winter's nap, and the cold air hit my hands as I pushed the lid of my tiny capsule over my head.

I don't think I will ever forget my first organic breath in five years.

The stench was shocking. I was floating in a fish tank brimming with deceased brethren. With the lack of atmospheric pressure it was difficult to take that first breath; with my lungs full of air I pulled myself out of the hollow well and sat on the edge, dangling my legs over into the submarine.

I had forgotten that the submarine was a dull gray. It hardly lustered under the gaze of the waxy moon above my head. Among the submarine lay hundreds of bodies in the water. Their backs to the sky, performing a ritual, as if they were bowing down to the moon in all Her glory. I could see no land, only bodies. Thousands upon thousands performing their ritual to the moon Herself.

Mother Nature had died, and Lady Luna had taken her place.

I craned my crooked neck to gaze upon Her beauty and Her stars. Oh how wonderful Her stars were.

I asked no questions, for I had all of the answers. I silently fell to where my back laid upon the roof of the cold submarine. I continued to gaze. I wanted my last few moments to be with Lady Luna and Her children. Lady Luna and Her Stars.