The rustling in the brush as Jack ran by only fueled his desire to get out of these woods as quickly as possible. A forest, dense with trees and undergrowth howled with mysterious sounds from a planet out of our known solar system. Looking around desperately trying to gauge a direction, Jack made a quick turn and found himself face to face with what he could only describe as a monster. Great flapping wings, like those of a moth except this creature has a body over a meter in length. A terrifyingly large moth that when flapping its wings, sprayed its prey in a powder, causing paralysis. Jack was quick to roll to the side, bringing out his knife.

“Fuck!” Jack exclaimed. “Where the hell did you come from?”

The creature opened its large mouth exposing row upon row of teeth. Drool dripping from the upper jaw down the lower jaw, the moth creature let out a low grumbling growl. Jack watched as the massive bulbous eyes turned to look where he had dashed to. Seeing this as his chance, Jack leapt at the creature, bringing his knife down through one of the wings, tearing it off the creature’s body. Howls of pain erupted from the mouth as it kicked and thrashed its small spindly legs. Falling to the ground with an audible thump, the creature dowsed itself in its own powder and slowly stopped moving and screaming. Jack watched as the moth lay motionless.

Knowing what the RRH would do to this thing, Jack did the only humane thing he could. Taking his knife and driving it through the head of the monstrosity, killing it. Better it dies here and now and let the other forest monsters have at it, then let the RRH take it and experiment on it. Wrenching his knife out, being careful to not get sprayed with the juice that erupted from the wound, Jack took notice of his surroundings.

All around him, trees of varying sizes, with leaves of every shape and color. The twin moons in the sky, one pink and one blue left a purple hue to the air. Listening, he could hear the stream nearby, and knowing the RRH were after him, he decided to avoid the stream and head in the opposite direction. Away from the water source, and away from the camp. Nicholas was sure to be close behind. Reaching into his pocket, Jack felt for the pocket sized cryo pods, the icosahedrons, or as they were commonly referred as, the Hedron. Not wanting to linger too long in one spot, Jack moved on towards the small clearing before the mountain pass.

Eyes watched as Jack moved slowly through the forest. Working very hard to make himself silent, he held his knife out, but no other monsters showed their head. Knowing they were out there, Jack started to recall the common ones that were probably watching him. There were spider and scorpion like monsters as big as a mid-size sedan, large snake type beasts with four mandibles that opened to reveal a tongue that also housed four long articulating teeth. The snake beast, or Gorger as it was known in camp also had several eyes upon his head. The one that concerned Jack the most though, was the Leatherback. An enormous beast with a horned head and hide that was thick, thick as leather. The Leatherback stood a good three men tall and had large muscular arms that could crush you.

“Well, damn.“ Jack said out loud to himself. “It’s dark, I’m alone, and armed with just a knife. I’m totally screwed.”

A rustling in the bushes near his left brought Jack out of his trance. Crouching to make himself seem smaller, let letting himself have enough room for a jump if needed. The rustling got closer, and eventually a small mouse looking miscreant emerged. Completely orange, with a flame on his tail. At first, Jack thought the creature may be on fire, but this was not the first time he has met a beast like this. The fire is a part of the animal. Using the fire to attack his food preferring to eat it scorched. A few within the RRH camp have attempted to befriend the little things, only to end up at the medic getting their burns wrapped.

“I would prefer you not to light me up.” Jack said to the fire mouse. “I would very much prefer you to fuck off.”

Jack attempted to shoo the mouse, only to be the victim of an attempted bite. Not wanting to antagonize the animal any further, Jack stood up and decided to head away from the rodent. Heading towards what he hoped was the clearing he remembered seeing on the map before his daring escape. What a long way he has come from the world he left behind.

Jack grimaced as he heard his voice over the loudspeaker.

“Jack Corbyn to the manager’s office.” Rang the voice in a long dull monotone.

“Well fuck.” Jack said.

Customers in the vicinity glared in his direction. Jack did not care; he knew what was coming. Walking the long way through the store, Jack contemplating just setting fire to the building. Walking into the long hallway towards the employee breakroom, only to take the door to his immediate right and into the dragon’s lair that was his manager’s office.

Upon entering, Jack was greeted with the whale of a woman who called herself *Hope*. Hope was not her real name, but she thought it made people believe she was a happy and friendly person. It did not give Jack that opinion. The woman was a monster. The usual bitchy manager type, constantly on you for not doing a job that is technically not yours to do anyways. If something goes wrong that she oversaw, it wasn’t her fault. The type of manager that reeks of toxicity in the workplace. The sheer size of the woman though, Jack has caught himself wondering how she fits through doorways, even sideways it looked like it would be a challenge. As only ever seeing her in the manager’s office, he has not had the pleasure of watching the struggle.

“Sit down Jackie.” Hope barked.

“I would really appreciate you not calling me that,” Jack started, but was caught off.

“I’ll call you as I please. I am the manager after all.” She said, with forced glee.

Jack took the seat opposite her desk, staring at her. Hope stared back, with a sly grin plastered on her face. He wondered if she finally figured out how to order food for delivery, or she finally found a place where she could order soda by the barrel instead of a small bottle. Not wanting to sit here long, jack spoke first.

“Was there something you needed..” jack began.

“Jack, how long have you worked for us?” Hope asked.

“Oh, um, four wonderful years.” Jack managed to squeeze out with a smile.

“Four *wonderful* years.” Hope repeated. “In those four years, you have continued to stay in your entry level position. Why?”

Not wanting to let on that jack would rather slurp rancid tuna salad out of a homeless persons rotting carcass than work closer to her, Jack lied.

“Oh, um, I never really saw myself as leadership material.” Jack stated.

“Never saw yourself as leadership material.” Hope repeated. “Well, that’s the problem Jackie.”

“Please don’t call me…” Jack began but was abruptly stopped as Hope raised her hand for silence.

“I’ve been observing you, Jack.” She started.

Jack found that hard to believe considering she never left the office.

“Watching how you interact with other coworkers, customers, and upper management.” She started, “And do you know what I’ve seen?”

“No?” Jack asked, not really caring to know the answer. He could see where this conversation was headed. The toilet.

“Well Jackie, it has not been great.” Hope said. “I can see why you don’t fancy yourself in a leadership position. You lack people skills. You lack conviction in your voice. You lack confidence in yourself. You lack confidence in the brand.”

“Cool.” Was all that jack could muster.

“I’m sorry to say it Jack, you’re not that great of an employee.” Hope said faking empathy in her voice.

“Why has this not been brought up by my supervisor in my bi-annual reviews?” Jack asked, knowing the answer.

“Your supervisor Derek, was too lenient, he was let go yesterday.” Hope said gleefully. “Need to have my supervisors better aligned with what the company wants after all. Can’t be having anyone who lacks leadership capabilities in charge you see.”

“So, you called me in here to tell me I’m awful?” Jack asked.

“Not at all, I’m just making conversation.” Hope said. “You see, this is how great leaders build relationships with their underlings, with conversation.”

“Conversation?” Jack began, but again was halted prematurely by Hope’s hands.

“I actually called you in here to fire you.” Hope said delighted. “Another great quality in a leader is to know a bad apple when you see one. And I definitely see one now.”

“Did you look in a mirror?” Jack said stone-faced.

“Excuse me?” Hope said heatedly. “I have given you every opportunity to come to work and better yourself, and this is how you treat me? Insulting me!?”

Jack stood up and made for the door, but before leaving, he turned around and asked.

“How is it you get through doorways?” Jack asked.

“What!?” Hope started, but jack cut her off.

“Well, judging by your size, even sideways it looks like you won’t fit. So, just being curious, how do you?” Jack laughed as he left the office.

Hope started screaming profanities towards Jack as he closed the door behind him. Seeing a few coworkers on the way out, he took off his work vest dropping it in the aisle, again contemplating burning the building down, but ultimately decided that orange was not his color, didn’t. Once out in the open, Jack felt freer than he has in a few years. Broke, probably will end up homeless, but free. Making his way home, Jack went ahead and splurged at the local sandwich shop for his favorite. Coming home to his barely furnished apartment in the cheap end of the city, jack sat on the couch and clipped on the tv and indulged himself in his food.

“The Red Right Hand needs you!” Came an advertisement catching jack’s attention.

He had seen these in the past but paid no attention. Now, being unemployed, he perked up a bit to see what this was about.