They were running.

They were running away from the evil that inherited the dismal existence of their lives. They were the only people in the area who had the ability to run. Nothing else mattered anymore.

Only the race.

It had been going for hundreds of years. Every year the race began at the same time in August and every year it ended on the same day in December, right in the dead of winter.

Frostbite managed to take the lives of the few who were proud to be called the victors. The race never had a winner. Every year someone new would come and attempt to take first place and every year it ended the same.

Death.

Tom figured this year would be different. He would win the race and take home the prize money of two hundred million dollars. He could feel it in his bones. He would win this race.

Tom took a quick look around the room. Four beds with a food slot in the corner. He decided to call dibs on the bed closest to the window. If he had to, he could escape by jumping out the window down two floors to the gravel parking lot below.

Tom looked out the window for a moment. Birds were flying in the distance. Oh to be free again. He thought. To be able to soar among the clouds and just be free. His time would come. It had to.

The door opened. A woman walked in. Looking around she sized Tom up quickly. She figured he wouldn't be much of a match. She was probably right. Walking over to a bed near the door she threw a duffel bag down. She was a redhead with blue eyes, roughly five foot nine.

Tom watched as she unpacked her belongings. A person can tell a lot about another person by what items they bring with them to a race. She packed light, just the essentials from the looks of it. Underwear, jeans, shirts of different sleeve lengths depending on the weather.

Tom wasn't sure if he should introduce himself or not as she refused to make eye contact with him.

After she unpacked her things, the woman looked over to Tom. “Name's JoAnn.” She said. “I'm not here to make friends, I'm here to win. So I would appreciate it if we didn't talk.”

“Tom.” He said.

JoAnn looked at the other two empty beds. They would be filled soon, she thought, she couldn't help but wonder what other freaks were going to join them. Lifting up her blouse JoAnn went to unhook her bra. She stopped and shot a glare over at Tom. Tom quickly looked the other way. She continued to get undressed, sliding her travel pants off, and change into something more accommodating to the race, a light pair of jeans and a light shirt. She placed her clothes back in the bag and tossed it under her bed.

Tom sat up on his bed and looked around the room again as JoAnn continued to ignore him. She really hoped he wasn't some pervert that was going to be keeping her up at night. She needed her sleep in order to be ready for the big day tomorrow. Tom pulled out a book and a pencil, he started writing in it. JoAnn didn't care what he was writing as long as it didn't have anything to do with her. His secret would be his own. For now. She laid down on her bed and started to drift off into dreamland. Tonight she would dream of home and life before she was pulled into the race. Of a better time when life was just good. She smiled as her dreams came to her.

Tom continued writing in his book. Every so often taking a quick peek at JoAnn. He had never been in the same room as a woman before. Tom hadn't ever had much luck in the whole dating scene. It wasn't allowed. His whole purpose in life was to train for the games. Here 25 years later, Tom was about to get into the most serious competition in his life. He didn't have time for socializing, especially with the enemy. Tom didn't want to tick her off. That would be a bad thing. Something told him that no matter what he did, she wasn't interested and would continue to avoid him at all costs. Unless he got in her way.

Finishing a few pages he read over his notes and then put the notebook away. JoAnn had the right idea a nap would be good. Tom slid under the sheets on his bed and closed his eyes. Whatever dreams he had tonight, Tom wished he could peer into JoAnn's dreams. See what kind of person he was up against.

A few hours later the door to the room opened. Two more contestants entered. Another male and female.

The male, at least six foot tall with blond hair and dark blue eyes surveyed the room for a moment. “This will have to do.” He said to his partner. Placing his hands on his hips he couldn't help but wonder what the whole game was about not having been told anything.

The female looked around as well. Her red hair and fair complexion said it all. She had a temper one her companion knew all too well. She wasn't amused with the accommodations. Of course it wasn't meant to be long term. They were just there for the night.

Continuing to look around the room they smiled at each other. The male looked at Tom and JoAnn for a moment. “Sleeping?” He said. “What's that all about?” He couldn't believe someone would want to sleep at a moment like this. No, this was a time to celebrate.

The female nodded. “Well they have the right idea. Tomorrow is going to be a big day.” She said. She got undressed and hopped on a between Tom and JoAnn's. “I claim this one.”

The man stripped as well and joined her. “Hope they don't mind us getting some exercise in.”

She bit her lip, “It's been awhile John. Too long.”

“I know Susan.” He said as he started to caress her body. She glistened. She moaned as he worked his way from her hips up to her mouth and kissed her gently. Every inch of her looked forward to the pleasure that was about to take place. Laying her down he continued to kiss her.

“Mmm” Susan said “Not all at once tiger.” She held his head in her hands. “At least let me make an effort to please you in return.” Susan laid her head back on the pillow and arched her back. Any thought of her pleasing him was about to be forgotten.

“Shhh” John replied. “We just got out of prison. I want to make this a memorable moment.” He continued his way with her as she let out a slight yelp. This night would be one to remember for sure.

As the couple started to make love Tom and JoAnn continued to sleep. Oblivious to the new occupants and the activities going around them. They would need their sleep. Tomorrow was a big day indeed. The start of the race, the game that would shape the rest of their lives. People had tried in the past to win the race and failed.

Across the complex others who had entered the race were dreaming. Dreaming of their lives. Each hoped to be able to have something better happen. Each had entered the race for a different purpose. Each purpose was important to each and every participant, even if that purpose was to shove everything they had gone through right back in the face of the government.