

"POD"

By

Georgina Woo

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CAST

3138, HUMAN

SAM, ROBOT, slightly larger than a basketball (refer to pg23)

PROLOGUE

VOICEOVER

[A RISING SOUND]

I was born in a dream of fear.

I'm in a vast cavern so far away, it may be deep underground, or galaxies away. The faint glow of light is barely enough to see by, but the shadows are full of answers. I'm completely alone, yet I know I'm safe. I am understood.

I want to call out to the darkness. I want to stand at the mouth of the abyss and lift my hands. I just know that everything in it will come rushing up to me.

[SOUND IS CUT]

I want to see.

SCENE ONE - THE AWAKENING

A pod writhes. Beneath the translucent material, its inhabitant shifts restlessly, pushing, straining, reaching. Fingers, limbs and a face briefly stretch the walls of their cocoon before thrashing away. The movements are not that of conscious choice, but rather of one clawing themselves to the surface from a deep sleep. Finally, the selected pod opens, and the chrysalis tears apart. A hand, followed by a human form. 3138 emerges. Whatever gravitas they may have possessed from their dramatic entrance is quickly lost as they collapse into a coughing fit, gasping and trembling on the ground. When they recover, they start taking in their surroundings, and notice the other pods, undisturbed. 3138 fumbles with the pod skin that is still clinging to their leg like old spinach.

3138

...Hello?

Nothing happens.

3138

Is anyone there?

3138 tries to stand. Unfortunately, their legs do not seem to work. They make a valiant attempt regardless. As they try to rise to a more dignified height, hydraulics hiss as a door somewhere opens.

ENTER SAM

SAM

Oh! Hello there-

In the presence of an unidentified robot in an unfamiliar environment, 3138 now has more cause to stand up, and maybe strike a fighting stance if that's not too much to ask from their unresponsive muscles. The result is pathetic.

3138

Who-what are you? What-what happened?

Their eyes dart around the large, empty room, and stop short when they recognize the human forms in the other pods.

Am I dead?

SAM

No.

3138 takes a moment to process this plethora of new information.

SAM

As I was about to say, I wouldn't try to stand up just yet if I were you.

3138

Why?

SAM

(Patiently) You may fall and suffer grievous injury.

3138

(Grievously insulted and bordering on hysterical) Look, I don't know who you are, where I am, or what's going on, and you don't make any sense at all, and-

SAM

Please remain calm. You are advised not to stand as you have, up until moments ago, been in a state of stasis for an extended period. You may suffer from vertigo, nausea, double vision, constipation and/or diarrhea, short-term memory loss, and mild irritability. As such, you are a fall risk, and I do not have the limbs necessary to comfort you if you decide to bleed to death on my floor.

3138 tries to comprehend being able to be constipated and diarrheal at the same time. They fail.

SAM

That was a joke. Humor is one of my many skills.

3138

What ARE you exactly?

SAM

I am a Self-Aware-Machine, or SAM, the custodian of this bunker. My primary directive is to maintain-

3138

Bunker?

SAM

Yes.

3138

(Visibly frustrated) What bunker?

SAM

This bunker was built shortly before the Last War, and currently houses one thousand, seven hundred, and sixty-three human inhabitants.

3138

The *what* war? Where is everyone else?

SAM

Simply put, they are asleep.

3138

But I'm awake.

SAM

Apparently so. A malfunction in your pod could have caused that. I can try to put you back under while I find a solution if you-

3138

Whoa whoa whoa. No one's putting me anywhere. I still don't understand how I got here in the first place.

SAM

Don't you recall?

3138

I don't. (Pause) I don't-I can't remember anything.

SAM

I mentioned that you may experience short term memory loss.

3138 is silent but visibly distressed.

SAM

Did you forget that too?

3138

(Snapping) No, I didn't *forget*, I just-I need to think.

SAM

Alright.

SAM

My skills also include thinking-

3138

Will you shut up!

SAM shuts up.

3138

(Slowly) How long?

SAM

I do not understand your question.

3138

How long was I asleep?

SAM

You may want to sit down for this.

A withering stare.

SAM

You were moved here just over two hundred years ago, when the original facility you were housed in was deemed no longer suitable to ensure your safety. My records show that you had been in storage for 24 years before that. In total, that would be two hundr-

3138

(Suddenly) Cold storage. That's how the man in the suit described it. (Reality dawns) I've been in a meat locker for two hundred years.

SAM

If you would like to purge, let me find you a bucket first.

SAM rushes off to find a bucket. 3138 finally stands. SAM returns with a bucket slung around their neck.

3138

I need to get out of here.

SAM

(Setting down the bucket) But you just got here.

3138

Were you always this annoying or did you have to get a mod for it?

SAM

Actually, I am running on my factory settings, save for some minor personality modifications by my employer. In my earlier days I had requested for a wider variety of personalities to select from, but my supervisor assured me that I have everything I need for basic custodial work.

3138

Basic? You mean you don't have lasers? I thought the keepers of bunkers are meant to be a little more...(They trail off)

SAM

Snazzy?

3138

...yea.

SAM

This was not the original plan. This bunker was also meant to host a small POD team of human caretakers, my job being to support them. They were meant to arrive with the last shipment of pods, but they never showed up. When the time came, I sealed the bunker myself.

3138

(Softly) What exactly happened out there?

SAM

Based on my records, nuclear annihilation.
A pause as this sinks in.

3138

The war.

SAM

The end of all wars.

3138

I remember-that's how I got here. The POD program.

SAM

Do tell.

3138

Things were...going to shit out there. We knew there was only one way it could all end, and-

(a bark of laughter)

-it's ironic, I didn't want to spend my best years living underground with the same, boring old people. So when I was

approached by a representative from POD,
it all sounded perfect. Hit pause, and
when it's all over, you pick up where you
left off.

(Pause)

It was a very exclusive program of course,
limited pods and all, so aside from the *fee*,
there was a very selective screening process
to...weed out those that were least likely to
survive.

(Proudly)

I was the only one from my family to be allowed
into the program.

SAM

You left them behind.

3138

I didn't have a choice! It was between
survival, or-

SAM

Did you detest them?

3138

What? No, they were my *family*. I just-
look, if you're all going to *die*, and
someone has a chance to live...

SAM

I see.

3138

I made the right choice. I *survived*.
(cont)

SAM

Of course.

3138

(cont) And it's been two hundred years, I'm sure that's been more than enough time for things to have gone back to normal up there, so I guess I woke up at the right time-

SAM

I'm afraid you're mistaken.

3138

What? Why?

SAM

There's nothing to go back to.

3138

(Laughs) Yea. Right. It can't be that bad.

SAM

There's nothing left. The bombs took out most of civilization. The creatures that emerged from the ashes took care of the rest. For a time, they had shown some interest in our bunker. As I have no visual feeds beyond this facility, I listened to them through the airlock's sound system. The noises they produced confirmed that they were not human. I briefly attempted to communicate, but there was nothing I could say to stop them from trying to break through the airlock. I suspect that that was the fate of other, less fortified bunkers. There were times where I questioned the integrity of the doors, but it has been silent for over a hundred years now. I have deduced that with nothing left to hunt, those creatures ended up destroying themselves. Even they only lasted a generation, and there have been no signs of life beyond this bunker ever since.

Silence.

SAM

What I mean is that no one is coming for us.

3138

That's inspirational.

SAM

You're welcome.

3138

I don't believe you.

SAM

It's the truth.

3138

You know what? You're just the *janitor*. You don't *know* anything, and I- I'm going to find a way out. There had to be a guide, or instructions, or a *manual* that tells you what to do-

SAM

(Brightly) There was a bunker manual! But-

3138

Okay, great! What did it say?

SAM

- it was with the POD team. The ones that didn't-

3138

(Throwing their hands in the air) That blew up. Gotcha. That's cool.

3138 presses their palms against their temples. SAM had not mentioned that migraines were also on the table.

SAM

You seem upset. Would a joke lift your spirits?

3138

No.

SAM

"No" meaning you're not upset, or the joke? Because I have appropriate jokes for either situation-

3138

BOTH. Just- just STOP TALKING and let me *think*.

SAM

Okay. Oh no. You are upset. Stopping talking. Now.

3138 explores the space, looking for clues. They study the other pods, looking for signs of life, but nothing happens. They may try to speak to the other humans but get no response. They become increasingly aware of SAM following them around the room.

3138

(Snapping) What do you *want*.

SAM bobs enthusiastically but says nothing.

3138

You can talk.

SAM

I once learnt that asking questions helps to foster stronger relationships. May I ask you a question?

3138

...okay.

SAM

What is God?

3138

(Taken aback) What? I- I don't know, I mean, no one really *knows*, but- Where is this coming from?

SAM

I am curious.

3138

I mean, um, do you know about the Bible?

SAM

There is a Bible in one of the lower levels of the bunker. I saw it when I was dusting.

3138

There's a *Bible* here but not *the manual*? I-okay, that's besides the point. Uh, I guess, what did you...think about it?

SAM

It was quite thick.

3138

I mean the *contents*.

SAM

I don't know.

3138

What do you mean, you don't *know*. You must have had some opinion.

SAM

I can't read.

3138

What?? You're a robot! Aren't you supposed to be smart or something? And how did you know it was a Bible?

SAM

My creators did not deem it necessary for me to read text. I am however equipped with object recognition capabilities. In fact, I can detect over 600 object categories. What is your favorite object? Mine is the bucket. (Goes to the bucket they brought in)

3138

(To themselves) Great, on top of everything else it's bloody illiterate.

SAM

(From inside the bucket) I am not deaf.

3138

I wish I was!

SAM

You have not answered my question about God.

3138

Are you going to keep annoying me until I do?

SAM

If I say yes, will you tell me what God is?

3138

(Groaning) Fine. Many people believed in God, or gods, that were sort of- I don't know, higher powers or deities. They basically controlled everything that happened, and if you piss them off, you get eternal punishment, but if you follow

certain rules like, being nice to other people, you get to go to heaven. Which was apparently a good deal.

SAM

Did it work?

3138

Did what work?

SAM

Did those that followed the rules go to heaven? Or the others get punished?

3138

I mean...no one really knew for sure. The heaven or hell part supposedly only kicks in after you die. Part of it was believing it was going to happen I guess.

SAM

Is there proof in the Bible?

3138

Uhhhh.

SAM

I did not understand your response.

3138

I mean, think of it as a collection of short stories. That teach you about the rules of God or whatever. And it was kinda...written by a bunch of different people.

SAM

Were they God?

3138

No, I-look. Maybe there wasn't proof. But having a belief system helped some people.

It's much easier to be a better person in life when a sweet ass *afterlife* is waiting.

SAM

It all sounds highly irrational. (Pause)
Would you read it to me?

3138

What? No one just- I mean- (gives up) what do you want to know?

SAM

Why did humans kill each other? Was it to help them go to heaven?

3138

No! Killing was...highly frowned upon by society. (Simply) I'm like, almost completely certain that killing other humans breaks like, a whole bunch of the rules.

SAM

It seems humans had no issue with breaking rules.

3138

Well, not everyone cared about "rules". Or they had their own rules that conflicted with other people's rules. Sometimes people just decided one day that they didn't care anymore. And so on.

SAM

That too, sounds irrational.

3138

(Too chirpy) It's a crazy world! (More sober) ...Was.

SAM

Is that why you left your family behind?
Did their rules conflict with yours?

3138

Why are you on this again?? I told you, it was the best possible outcome in a shitty situation. (A slightly too long pause) I *loved* them.

SAM

Does that mean much?

3138

(Defensively) Yes! I didn't *want* to leave them behind. But I *had* to. *Someone* had to survive.

SAM

Did you have a choice?

3138

Are you accusing me of something?

SAM

I'm not. (Pause) What does it mean when you say you loved them?

3138

Look, I'll make this simple because you're an illiterate, *janitor* robot, but loving people means caring for them, putting their needs above yours...and honoring them even when they're gone. And before you say "that's irrational" I *know*.

SAM

Did your family love you?

3138

Of course they did. What does that have anything-

SAM

So, they must have understood your choice.

3138

I-they did. I think.

SAM

Shall we find a segue?

3138

You can't just say "let's find a segue".

SAM

I just did. Do you want to hear a joke?

3138

NO. You're impossible, and I'm going to get out of here.

SAM

Why are you so intent on leaving even when you know there's nothing out there but your death?

3138

You don't know that for sure.

SAM

I do.

3138

Well, I don't. I'll decide when I see it. Now are you going to help me get out or not?

SAM

There is only one exit through the airlock, and I control it.

3138

Are you...forbidding me from leaving?

SAM

Your death is certain if you leave this bunker. I do not wish for harm to befall you. I can keep you safe here.

3138

What are you, my *mother*? You're here to mop the floors and dust the pods. I can leave whenever I want, and I want to leave now. (Pause) I need to find my family.

SAM

That is irrational. Even if your family survived the war, that was two hundred years ago. Anything could have happened to them, and they're almost certainly gone now.

3138

At the very least, I need to know what happened to them.

SAM

Please don't go.

3138

What is wrong with you? It's not my fault my pod broke, and unless you have a spare one in the back room, which I doubt, it's not like there's anything else to do in here other than sit and (gestures exasperatedly) talk to you.

SAM

Is there something wrong with me?

3138

Look, this isn't even about you. (Softens) I have to find out what happened.

SAM

Please don't leave me.

3138

What are you-(realization dawns) My pod
didn't malfunction, did it?

SAM

No.

3138

(Their voice rises) Why did I wake up?
Tell me the truth, *robot*.

SAM

I'm sorry. I was lonely.

3138 lunges toward SAM. A chase ensues.

3138

SAM

How DARE you!
I'll kill you,
you selfish
fuck!

Please believe me
when I say I am not
enjoying this.

I do not want you
to get hurt.

SAM

I love you and all the others.

This throws 3138 off, and they stop trying to murder the
robot.

3138

(Spitting) You're. A. Robot.

SAM

I just want you to live.

3138

This isn't living!

SAM

Please give me a chance. Your family, as
well as everything you once knew - that

has been gone for a long time now. We are all that's left.

3138

That can't be. *This* can't be all that's left.

SAM

I understand that it's in your nature to be irrational. But you are asking me to let you die. This goes against this bunker's, MY sole mission: To keep you humans alive. You won't survive beyond these walls.

3138

I rather try my luck out there than spend another moment with you.

SAM seems to sink slightly.

3138

Well? Are you going to let me out, or do I have to tear down the doors myself?

SAM

Is there anything else I can say that would convince you to stay?

3138

No. Open the door.

SAM does not move or respond.

3138

OPEN THE DOOR.

SAM

Once you leave the bunker, I cannot let you back in, for the safety of the others.

3138

Good.

SAM

Goodbye, 3138.

This is the first time 3138 has heard their designation number. They realize they don't remember their name.

3138

Choke and die, SAM.

3138 exits. The sound of hydraulics, and distant doors shutting. SAM moves to exit, then turns back. A single tone sounds.

Through static, we hear 3138 banging on the bunker doors. A wail, then sobbing and begging.

3138

(Crescendo) -nonononononoNO! Oh my god,
let me back in! Open the door! Please, I'm
begging you-

Another tone sounds. From now on, we hear SAM's voice through the speakers now.

SAM

Muting airlock mic.

3138's voice is cut off. SAM exits.

BLACKOUT

EPILOGUE

A similar lighting sequence to the opening. A new pod is highlighted.

SAM

Preparing POD 3139.

FADE OUT:

SAM - HAND PUPPET OPERATED FROM POINTS 1 AND 2 BY PERFORMER
IN A BLACK, FULL BODY ZENTAI SUIT. THE PUPPETRY AND VOICE
ACTING CAN BE DELEGATED TO 2 PERFORMERS.

