Atmosphere

Automatic

Amiable

Arcane

Arc

In the Capital, you are the Bait.

Into the darkness, you yawn, the first sound of the day echoing hollowly against the concrete walls of the Battery. A few heads swivel, automatically attuning to the first break in the quiet atmosphere. The heads search anew, as they always do, evaluating one another as the potential source.

The uniform They make you wear is blindingly white, except where it’s not dirty and torn, or where there are dark red stains around the neck and abdomen. You’ve never asked why, though you always knew. It doesn’t matter anyways; in the pursuit of increased productivity, every decision is justified.

With reservations about the dresswear, you’re quite amiable towards the rest of your responsibilities. After donning the artifact of someone else’s last days, you begin stretches. Shredded ears notice as you move and breathe heavily, tentative steps bringing Them closer to you. The floor groans, gears turn and mesh, preparing to use Their insatiability to power the Capital.

You orient yourself away from the always envious eyes, forcing yourself once again into the vulnerable position; apparent obliviousness is paramount to success. You close your eyes, kneel, put your hands against the unforgiving, expecting floor. You tense.

Your body is a bullet, ready to be triggered.

Your only goal, thought, being, is this:

*Run*.

You ignite.

And everything in the Battery pursues you.

Every body pushes the floor backwards, turning the world’s largest generator. You dodge between trees and abandoned structures manifested from the front of the capacitor. They stumble in their mostly uncoordinated hunt. Your legs have by now perfected the arcs of a sprint; your feet beat the pavement that you’ve tread thousands of times before. The path is well known to you, but Their object impermanence makes the chase real to Them.

As you sprint, a few get close, faster than the average,

Faster than you.

They reach out to you, wanting hands aching for contact.

Every time, it makes you laugh that they don’t see or remember the arcane walls surrounding you. But you need them to run, to turn the giant treadmill under their feet. So, you slow down, teasing them with opportunity, giving Them hope of a new recruit, driving them on.

Your steps are slowing, but you’re relaxed: your safety has never been compromised. When you’ve seldomly fallen in the past, your barrier has protected from Their sharp claws and strong jaws as you regain your footing.

As you straighten, words appear constantly 5 feet in the air ahead of you. A message from up high, from Capital: *Your productivity: - 15%. Replacement necessary*. You read the words and falter at the statistic. That can’t be right.

You’re the best Bait they have.

You ran the Battery for a year.

You wear the fucking uniform.

You feel the hand on your shoulder.

And the teeth impaling your bicep.

And the power of their jaws crushing your bones.

The Battery is quiet for a few days, which leaves the Capital to run on reserves. What’s left of you has been adopted into the chase, a new contender in the eternal cycle. What wasn’t converted into one of Them has become a foreign landmark to assist navigation. You’ll never realize that was once you.

Then you hear a new sound. Your head swivels, searching the others for originator. Your shredded ears hear the hot breaths, your rotting feet tentatively approach. Your eyes land enviously on the oddity, knowing it’s one of You but not You yet.

You stare at the frightened face.

Welcome, newcomer. In the Capital, You are the Bait.