

A MAN, HIS DOG, AND AN UNRELATED FISH

Nander Voortman

To my dearest friends, you mean the world to me.

Introduction

Most people spend their entire lives wondering why things in their lives turned out the way they did. Most people will never find this out. I'm both blessed and cursed by actually knowing what major events shaped my life. I'm both figuratively and literally at the center of this story. This is my story on who made my life the life it was.

To tell a story, it's best to tell the stories of the people who made it happen. Every event has a person who made it happen. It was originated from a choice of a person, who may have had a chance to change it. This is not a story of blame, but rather, an intriguing thought experiment from an observer. And, since the world is at it's end anyway, there's not much left to get angry about.

Let's start with our first major actor in my story: Dennis. He may not look like much, but he's probably the most important person to the start of this story.

Dennis

My name is Dennis de'Moire, and you've somehow stumbled upon my lives work; my autobiography. Given the events leading up to here, it's quite remarkable that this work found it's way to you. I never thought anyone besides me would read this work.

Perhaps the best way to start this story is by describing a normal day in my life.

Like most days, I woke up around six this morning. This enables me to get some work done, before the light in the sky gets too hot. But before doing anything, I draw a line on the wall, so I can count the days since I started living here. The last time I bothered to count, I quit counting at eight thousand, so I've lived here for over twenty years now.

You may be wondering why I've lived here for so long, but you could say that there's something keeping me here. I live on a rock in the middle of a permanent storm, and have no way to leave.

The storm only has one big advantage, it brings materials, which I can scavenge. Anything can end up here, from food to building materials to children's toys.

The thing I most hope to find is written material, but that's unfortunately quite a rare find. This is mostly caused by the fact that the storm heavily damages most things that pass through it. Since most data in the rest of the world is digital, I mostly find broken memory cards.

After completing my round, and repairing any damage done by the storm, I usually tend to my farm, removing weed, and watering crops that need water. After that, I spend the rest of the day on improving my house and surrounding area. One of the projects I recently completed was the hanging bridge to the other island.

My breakfast highly depends on what washes up here. Today is a good day, because I found coffee a few days back. Sometimes though, I have to go weeks without coffee. Besides that, most of my food is easy-to-serve food, since most other food is stale by the time it ends up here.

But who am I fooling by writing this down as though everything is pretty and all, we all know what events caused me to live here. It's not as though I choose to take a twenty-year sabbatical at the end of the world. The truth is, I'm stuck here on this rock. I have been stuck here for over twenty years now, and have long given up on ever leaving it. The event-that-changed-the-world left me stuck here, and then I was no longer able to return to the rest of the world. The energy-field around my place renders travel for anything living impossible. My house is safe though, because it's in the center of the energy-storm.

Some people would consider living here a punishment, and would wonder what they had done to deserve it, but I don't like to think like that. The truth is, I don't really mind living here. I was never a very sociable person, always minding my own things. Here,

nobody ever complains. Here, nobody asks you about your achievements. Instead, I can just do my thing, without worrying about anyone else, and what their opinions might be. Nevertheless, the loneliness does sometimes get to me. I especially miss having people to talk to, to debate philosophical and scientific questions. And, although my ex-wife hates me, I would have still wanted to see my son again.

The rock I'm living on has a small shelter, which I've improved to become a proper home over the years, using the materials that end up here. For this reason, my house looks like it wasn't designed, but rather, grew over time. The first floor is built using metal plates, with wooden beams to support it. I found some transparent plastic plates one day, so I added windows to my home. The plates weren't in a regular rectangular shape, but I decided I liked the irregular shapes. For this reason, none of the windows on my house looks the same as any of the others.

When walking out of the door, you first pass a small grassy piece of land, and then end at the Bridge. It's quite mossy grass, because it rains quite a bit here, and any plants that can't handle the rain here have no chance of surviving.

The Bridge took quite some effort to build, because the gravity fields of both rocks extend quite far, and there was no way to reach the other rock yet. However, one day a long rope ended up on my rock, and I used that to create a rope-connection between both sides, enabling me to traverse between both locations, greatly simplifying the construction of a bridge.

The rest of my own rock is filled with farmland, to ensure a minimal food production, but mostly, to keep myself occupied during the day. I get most of my food from scavenging though.

The other rock I left mostly untouched, only using it as a place to meditate and write. I only take care to prevent it from getting overgrown. Since I don't really need this space anyway, I decided I just keep it the way I found it. I do still gather whatever materials end up on this rock, because resources can sometimes be scarce here. Because of the direction of the storm though, fewer materials end up on this rock, compared to my original rock. But still, one pack of coffee can make the difference for quite a while.

Since a few years, I also have a dog. I decided to call it Atropos, named after one of the three goddesses of fate in Greek mythology. I'm not sure how it ended up here; I guess it must have come here with the storm. This bewilders me though, because the only living things making it through the storm seem to be creatures of low intelligence, such as flies or fish. Other animals seem to mostly get killed, and arrive here as carcasses. I always assumed this was because the storm made the brains of more intelligent creatures to be damaged beyond repair. I don't complain about my theory being wrong though, Atropos is an amazing dog. She's always on my side, and a willing listener, when I'm contemplating about life.

One of the advantages of the place I'm living is that throwing a stick is quite intriguing. The gravity field of the rock is spherical, and quite small. This means that, to throw a stick here, you have to take care of not throwing it too fast, otherwise it will escape the sphere of influence of the rock, and you will never see it again.

During my first years here, I used to write letters, put them in containers and throw them off of this rock, hoping they would find someone to read them.

After breakfast, I start my scavenging round. This means walking around both rocks, looking for things that weren't there the day before. This can be almost anything, from plants to food to children's toys.

Since my two rocks aren't that big, I can usually finish my round in a few hours. Just as I thought today's round would be an uneventful one, with only some scrap material found, I noticed movement in the pond. I blinked a few times, because I couldn't believe my own eyes. Also, you have to be wary of the things you're seeing, after you've lived without company for as long as I have. But even after pinching my arm, I still saw it. In the otherwise-dead pond, there now was a fish. It's existence intrigued me. Questions raced through my head; Where did it come from? Why is it here? How did it survive it's travel from where-ever it came? I tried asking the fish, but it didn't have an answer to any of my questions. This of course makes perfect sense, since it's a fish. However, try living without human company for 25 years, and see how you react to suddenly seeing another living being. Besides, who knows what else changed after the Event. After observing the fish for a while, I came to two conclusions. One, fishes probably behave exactly like they do before the event, and two: it's probably hungry. I ran back to my storage room, and started looking for fish food. I knew I found it a while back, and, since I had space left for it, decided against throwing it away.

The fish seemed to like the food I gave it. It could be wishful thinking, but I think I see it move a lot more happily now that it has had food.

Before the Event, my life was different. I wouldn't call it wild, but I enjoyed my life. I was a theoretical physicist, and a renowned one at that. My field of research was mostly into the fundamentals of matter and energy. When I was studying it, String Theory and Quantum Physics were starting to become understood. Or at least, they seemed to describe the world quite well. The world before the Event, that is. At that time I often wondered about the scale of the universe, and how much of it we were able to observe. Like most other theoretical physicists, I could not reasonably prove that there wouldn't be things besides our observations, but, without proof, it stayed a subject of philosophical wonder, rather than a scientific one.

However, I don't think anyone could have foreseen how much we weren't seeing.

Theoretical physics generally isn't the type of research that's flashy or extreme. The experiment setups used are almost always atrociously expensive, but the results are

generally not exciting for anyone who isn't a theoretical physicist. However, during one experiment, I noticed a weird fluctuation that couldn't be explained by generally accepted laws of physics. The particles observed seemed to change directions at random, regardless of the rest of the observed material. From this, I concluded that these particles must be influenced by an external, as of yet unknown, force.

After verifying this with some colleagues, I presented my results in a scientific paper. This paper was met with mixed enthusiasm. Journalists seemed to generally love it, but my peers seemed to think I was making things up. Nevertheless, it caused quite a stir in the scientific world, granting me the possibility to obtain significant funds for future research.

I attracted a few team-members, and was permitted to use a special laboratory in Switzerland. I designed and built a special container, designed specifically to not permit other influences. From the previous experiments, we had some idea on how to create the new particles. Thus, our concept was to create these particles in two containers, devoid of means of communication through any known method. This should at the very least provide insight in if these particles are able to communicate with each other through as of yet unknown means.

A couple of months later, this set-up was ready, and we started running our experiments. It turned out the results were even more bizarre than we thought. The particles not only seemed to share information, but they also seemed to change their behavior, in order to optimize for certain factors of their environment. Also, changing aspects about one container made the particles in the other container aware of these changes as well.

After a while we noticed something even more baffling, the particles seemed to start affecting the limited available regular matter, changing their properties substantially. While it was only visible briefly, and showed only tiny bits of light, the results showed promise.

However, our experimental setup was too small to have more than that. Therefore our results were still quite limited. This was a necessary limit of our setup, because we couldn't create the circumstances required for the particles to start existing for bigger containers.

We redid the same experiment a multitude of times. Every time, the results seemed to differ quite wildly, but every time some strange aspects were observed. However, since we were running quite low on funds, we decided to demonstrate our set-up, and publish the results.

The demonstration was a disaster. Somehow, this was the first time the result was not strange, but rather, shockingly normal. All the press and other scientists saw our, expensive, set-up do nothing more than light up a few LED lights.

Thus, instead of becoming heroes, me and my team were put in doubt. Some

scientists said it could be the result of the so-called demo effect, but for most people, it just seemed like yet another example of physicists wasting public money. We tried to prove our research was actually real, but all of our results could have just as easily been made up as actually detected, so nobody believed us.

To save his own name, one member of my team started to claim that the research was faked, and soon my reputation was destroyed. He was a promising scientist, so, in a way, I can't even really blame him. Still, it hurts to be let down by the people you worked with for years. I tried talking to him about it, but he said he didn't want to talk about it, saying I almost destroyed his career. He said that I should never contact him again.

After this, things got worse quickly. Every parody newspaper started doing articles about my work, and the entire world was laughing. In a few weeks, years of work was undone, and my career seemed to be over.

Some of my colleagues even handed my work in at a science-fiction writing contest. They said it was interesting, but fundamentally flawed, because it was too unbelievable.

Since I built my entire life around my scientific career, my entire life started collapsing with my career. I lost contact with my friends, who all seemed to not want to be around me anymore. I felt like I was falling into an abyss, with no way to climb up. Over the next weeks, I continued falling, until I almost hit rock-bottom. I was almost ready to just give up and end it there. However, during an evening walk, in which I was contemplating my life, a miracle happened. I met Cecilia. She was beautiful that night, ... She had seen me walking, and recognized me. She asked me how I was doing, and I just collapsed into tears. All the emotions of a few months of pain and disbelief were turned into tears. She waited kindly, and, when I was done, provided me with a tissue. She told me that there's life besides your career, and also, that things can get better again. Even though I didn't believe her at this time, I still got calmed by her words. Even though I had only met her an hour before that, I felt like she was the kind of person I wouldn't mind being around.

We started walking again, and she got me talking about things I liked doing. She told me that I should try to find something I want to be doing, and start doing that. If nobody is going to believe you anyway, you might as well start writing Science Fiction, she said jokingly.

What she didn't know is that I had actually been an unknown Science Fiction-writer, anonymously releasing short-stories on-line. They were quite loved by a small community. I had never been proud of my writing though, and hadn't shown anyone I knew in real life.

A few days later, we met again, and hung out. It was as though we had always been friends. I decided to show her my work, and asked her if she believed that I was telling the truth. She told me that she believed me. Knowing this, I could find some peace with what happened with my scientific career, and leave it behind. I decided to leave the

scientific community forever, and focus on what people thought I was already doing anyway: writing science fiction.

Over the following weeks, our contact got closer and closer, and at one point she asked me when I was going to ask her on a date. I blushed, and asked 'right now?'. She jokingly remarked that she was very surprised about that. We went on a date two days later. Because we both weren't creative with these things, we decided to just go to a restaurant. After a long discussion, we decided to go to a small local restaurant called Tim's Tacos. Although the reviews were varying, it seemed to be a nice, small restaurant. We found a nice table for two in a corner of the room. We decided to both go for the specialty of the house. We were so lost in our own world that we didn't notice our food took an infinity to get ready. However, this wouldn't have mattered if the food was any good. It wasn't. The stuffing was great, but the tacos were burnt to a crisp. From the color, you'd think it was made from wholegrain taco's, but it was just burned. To us that night however, it didn't matter, because we had each other. Thus, we decided to just not leave a tip, and not make more of a fuzz about it. After the restaurant, we went to watch a movie. After the movie, we went to my place, and talked about everything, and nothing. As the sun was rising again, we became a couple.

Over the next months, our contact got even increasingly intense. We moved in together a few months later. During that time I was happier than I had ever been before.

About a year later, she got pregnant. We didn't really plan for it to happen yet, but we didn't really mind it either way. Both of us had long wished for children, but we just didn't get around to it yet.

From there on, it seemed to only go up-hill. I felt like my life couldn't get any better. I got more joy out of designing the baby room than I ever got out of science. The simple pleasures of choosing paint, and which crib we should buy got me immensely happy. When we found out it would be a boy, we started to think of a name. We weren't able to get to agreement on it yet however.

After doing my round, I decided to walk around, and care for the nature on both rocks. My favorite spot is on the other side of my rock, compared to my home. I jokingly call this the south pole, just like I call the place where my home is the North Pole. Compasses don't work on the rock though, I think the storm renders them useless.

Two months later however, everything changed. We were starting to move to a different, bigger, house, and I was sifting through old objects we still had lying around. We didn't have many old objects, but moving is always a good moment to sift through it, and decide what you really want to keep. Among these, I found my wife's old diary. I was intrigued to read what's in there. I knew I really shouldn't read in it. Though I felt like I was infringing on her privacy, I couldn't hold my perceived need to read it.

Reading through it, I felt quite happy, because it showed she really loved me a lot. She wrote that meeting me was one of the happiest things that happened in her life. She wrote that I was her everything, and that she would give up anything to be with me.

However, on one of the pages, I read something that shocked me. She said there that she really thought I should give up on my scientific career, because I was making myself look like a fool. She said that she thought my ideas were insane, and wondered how anyone could even believe the things I was saying. This made me feel sick, because it felt like betrayal. It felt like she had entered my life based on a lie.

I managed to continue my life as-is for a while, although it seemed to have lost its color. Things that were fun suddenly seemed to have no more value.

I decided to confront my wife about this, but, instead of apologizing, she got angry at me. It was all my fault, I should have never read that diary to begin with. I suppose that's correct, but it's nothing compared to her not believing me. I mean, how can anyone lie to someone about something that person thinks is so important? Even if I made it a too big part of my life, lying about that...

Knowing she never believed in my research, I could no longer trust her opinion on me continuing it. I decided that I wanted to continue my research, and was willing to sacrifice quite a lot for this. For days in a row, I couldn't sleep. I was tired, but I couldn't fall asleep with the knowledge of her having betrayed me.

After this fight, it felt like our relationship wasn't the same it used to be. I think the spark between the two of us was built upon a lie, and that lie had now come out. So, basically, the love was gone. I delved myself into writing. However, writing also slowly started to feel meaningless. It seemed the only way for me to continue would be to try to regain my position as a scientist. However, that path seemed further away than ever.

It has started to rain. Rain is quite different here, compared to what I remember of the days before the Event. Instead of droplets, it's more as though temporary waterfalls hit the ground. Oddly enough, getting rid of the water here is one of the main challenges of living here. It's better to stay inside here during the rain, because it can hurt quite a bit to be hit by the streams of water. Also, the temperature of the water varies quite wildly.

A few years after the disaster that ended my scientific career, the scientist that told everyone my research was fake, Arthur Quincy, did a live demonstration not dissimilar to mine.

Arthur and I had never been on good terms, from the day we met each-other we both knew we were destined to be rivals. Of course, he took care to invite me.

We met during a lunch-break, when we were still both studying at University. I had just had a breakthrough for a paper I was working on, and was explaining it to my friends. He explained, in high volume (ensuring everyone around us would be able to hear it), why my idea was both simple, as well as stupid. And even though critique and discussion are essential parts of scientific conversation, between Arthur and me, it always seemed to be more about the other person, than about the content itself. To be fair, it wasn't just him, the contact between the two of us also brought out the worst in me.

So, when I received his invitation, I was tempted to do either of two things, either to not show up, or to make sure he didn't succeed, meaning he would show to be a fool. I quickly decided on the latter, because I didn't want him to succeed, especially not since he had used much of my work.

My plan was deceptively simple, make everyone believe that Arthur's research was fake, and that his demonstration was nothing more than a circus trick. I set out to design a complicated contraption, designed to look like it could make special effects similar to the way the energy looks.

However, as the day of the event grew nearer, I came to realize that it would almost be impossible to make this spectacular type of energy look like it wasn't real. Besides that, his work, in a way, proves my work was actually valid.

So, instead, I became focused on outdoing Arthur, and therefore proving that I was the one responsible for this energy. Our rivalry gave me the energy required to start working. I designed further experiments, which could be used to prove the additional properties of the energy found.

I didn't manage, however, to do this before Arthur's big reveal, and he became the symbol of a new possible future. Everyone loved him, scientists, journalists, politicians, artists. My wife even admitted to me that she thought he did really good for the world, because he made this available to the world. When I mentioned to her that he basically stole my work, she told me that I should just stop lying.

During his reveal, Arthur had carefully left out that the energy has a will of it's own, claiming I was just a lunatic, a science fiction-writer gone scientist. So, even though I tried to tell people about this, even much more incredible, property of the newly-found energy, nobody wanted to believe it. This seemed to have two reasons: people both didn't understand, and didn't want to understand. The idea of energy wanting something was simply too bizarre for most people. Electricity doesn't want to turn on the light, it turning on the light is simply a consequence of physical processes. None of the physical processes known at that time were in any way similar to the way this Energy behaves.

It showed that our view of the world might actually be incomplete, and instead, there might be much more sentience in the universe than we're aware of. This may have actually scared people enough to not want them to believe it. It's a lot more simple to wish away the evidence and to say the person claiming such things to be true has to be a lunatic, because then you don't have to think about such things.

Time is strange here. Day and night don't really mean much, since it doesn't really get darker. There is a 24-hour cycle though, with a period of relative calm, and a period of heavy storms. During the storms, staying outside is really unwise. Thus, I choose to call the stormy period night, because that's the period where it's more convenient to sleep. During that period, the clouds in the sky move around the rock at an alarmingly high

pace. There is still light outside during that period though, so, to get sleep, I had to blind my windows. I haven't seen the stars for around 25 years now. Instead, the sky permanently looks like a glowing cloud, with rocks and particles hanging in it. Some of those rocks probably also have people living on them, but I have no way of knowing, since I have no way to reach them.

I do know there's life beyond my rock though, because I've found written text from after the Event. Lately though, these have been getting more scarce, and more frightening.

One of the main limitations of both my research, and Arthur's is the fact that it was contained within a comparatively small device. This meant the energy that could be obtained from it was comparatively low, and also meant we didn't have enough of it to properly observe it, beyond it's existence. My early experiments proved some behavior could be possible within the container, but it doesn't have to happen every time.

I knew I wouldn't be able to get the resources required for such an experiment from the scientific community, for two reasons. For one, my name had become a proverb in the scientific world, meaning as much as 'publishing science fiction as science, instead of as fiction'. Secondly, Arthur had become quite a powerful person within the scientific world, and I don't think he would have permitted my research to take place. I don't know though, because I didn't even want to try to talk to him to obtain the funds needed. There was still a limit to how much I was willing to do to achieve my goals. Even though my life had lost some of it's glow, I still didn't want to lose it all to my work.

This changed a few months later, just after the birth of our son, Evan.

I rested my pen, because the memories started to cause me to become emotional. I still feel the betrayal I felt on that day.

It's a saying that the husband is always the last one to know when a wife is cheating. I only found out months after it started to happen apparently.

Over the course of a few months, she had been absent increasingly during evenings, saying she was requested to work overtime at work.

After that, I stopped caring. Friends, enemies, loved ones, it started to become all the same to me. They were all just distractions preventing me from doing the thing I had set out to do: proving the world that I was right, and that the energy I had found actually does transfer information, and So, I started thinking of ways to reach that goal. I figured out after a while that there was one person in the entire world that would be able to help me with this. I sighed, and decided that contacting Arthur, and cooperating would have to be the next thing to do. Although he was surprised at first, he had also gotten wiser with age, and he agreed to meet. After formalities, we had quite a nice conversation, and we managed to laugh about quite a few of the events that happened in the past. He told me

that he felt sorry for what he did to my scientific career, and I told him I couldn't really blame him. This was a lie, but at this point, I no longer cared for these kinds of things, I just wanted to be able to do the required research.

After a while, I showed him my data I found, and he went silent. He said that during one of his tests he had found very similar data, but he said he thought it was just a sensory error. He said it could be very interesting to try to do further research into this subject. He told me however, that my name could, of course, not be affiliated to this research, because it had become dirty. I sighed deeply, and then agreed that the research would have to be done on his name. For me, it was no longer about the rest of the world believing me, but rather, about showing myself that I was right. I saw myself simply as a gear in the scientific machine, only having value because of the things I add to the scientific status quo.

Arthur was quite surprised by the ease with which I decided I was fine with this way of working, but didn't complain. Soon, we set to work. It was amazing to see how much we were able to achieve together. It seemed the two of us really added to each other. In a way, it was really saddening to think about how long the two of us had been rivaling each other, instead of working together. But, none of that mattered at this point, as long as the research kept moving forward.

In the end, we built a prototype with a bigger container, to do some more advanced experiments. From these experiments, we figured out that the Energy started behaving more radically than either of us had expected. This led to a problem though: Arthur was starting to worry about the risks we were taking with our research. I told him science cannot decide not to do things, purely based on fear. We in the end agreed to do a slightly bigger experiment, and to try to figure out more. I mean, what if we figured out why the Energy was behaving the way it is, we could start to understand much more of the structure of the Universe.

Based on a gut feeling, I decided we were going too slowly, and that the results of the next experiment could cause Arthur to want to stop further experiments. Thus, I started to design a purposeful flaw into the next experiment. I would purposely build a mistake into the containment, causing the Energy to be able to flow out of its containment. I worked this into the design; Arthur didn't notice.

A couple of months later our latest experiment was ready. We both agreed this would be the final one for now, because the risks of increasing scale would probably be too much. This meant that if I wanted to have a chance at doing finishing the experiment, this would be the only possible time. Therefore, though the possible results of the experiment weren't clear, I decided to take the risk and go ahead with the altered experiment.

Arthur had expressed worries that letting this energy lose into our world could have irreversible consequences. At that time, I didn't think much of these worries. It turned out

my decision then had severe consequences.

Then the day came for the actual experimentation. We agreed that, since he was getting the PR for it, I should be the one to control the machine. So, I turned on the machine to start the experiment. We both knew immediately that it would have some success. Everything, from the smell in the air, the light, as well as the strange ominous sound, everything indicated something world-changing was about to happen. I let out a sigh as I verified the parameters of the initial setup. Since everything was within the values predicted while preparing for this experiment, I decided to go ahead. I pressed the second button to start the experiment.

By the time Arthur noticed the experiment was going different from planned, it was too late. He managed to shut off the machine, but some of the Energy was already released into the air. A flashing bolt of energy shot out of the machine, into the room. It first danced around freely, as though stretching its legs.

Arthur's eyes showed a combination of disbelief and terror. The Energy started to take the shape of a sphere, moving through the room as though none of the laws of physics had much grip on it. Then it stopped moving, hanging perfectly still in the air. It seemed to observe us, as much as we were observing it. It felt as though something terrible was about to happen, but nothing was happening yet. Arthur and I tried approaching the sphere. It didn't like that, and moved away from us. It stayed on a comfortable distance. Even though it lacked eyes, or any other obviously visible means of observation, we felt like it was observing our every action. This stand-off continued for a few minutes, after which the sphere suddenly started moving again. The sphere has finished observing people, and seemed to have decided it was now time for action.

It seemed to be unsure of where it was, and collided with a desk, causing the desk to catch flame. Arthur started to panic. He picked up the first thing he could find, and threw it at the sphere. The sphere instantly changed location to be next to Arthur's head, causing some of his hairs to burn. After that, the Sphere retreated again, and slowly flew around, observing everything in its surroundings. Suddenly, it changed behavior rapidly, as though it had figured something out. It delicately touched the control mechanism of the experimental setup, which caused it to reboot, and restarted its process. The flow of Energy resumed. As time progressed, the sphere grew in size. At this point, Arthur ran away.

As the Sphere grew in size, the earth started to tremble. I slowly walked away, because it became obvious that this would not end well. I managed to get away before other people started noticing something was wrong. As I was leaving, other people within the facility had figured out what was going on, and started to panic. I decided to go into hiding nearby, awaiting what would happen next. I didn't want to be around when people found out what had happened, because I feared for the consequences.

At that point, I realized the decisions I had made would have a lasting effect on the world. This being seemed to be more powerful than I could have imagined beforehand. I just hoped it would like us humans, if it even had a concept of liking.

The doomsday clock moved to midnight.

The entire research facility was engulfed by the sphere within the next hour. It seemed to continue growing at a slow, but certain pace. Since the inflow seemed to be constant, the increase in radius was getting lower. From that point on, it lost its sphere-like shape, instead becoming more of an amorphous shape, stretching out as it pleases. When it left the facility, it became world-news. Everyone and his dog had an opinion on it. Most people though, were frightened by it. Some people had tried attacking it, but it just ignored the attacks. But, since no real damage was done yet, most people just continued their lives as though nothing had happened. They just assumed someone would solve it at some point, just like with every other disaster before. Sure, this one is a bit bizarre, but if everyone works together, humanity should be able to win this, people argued.

However, as the Shape continued growing, everyone started to get more anxious. Every country in the world wanted, as could be predicted, to have a say in the reaction that should be given. The United States claimed it was within their right to establish first contact with the Shape, while Switzerland said it's theirs, since it manifested on Swiss soil. In the end, it was agreed that all nations of the world should be represented in the attempts to communicate with the Shape. So, ironically, for the first time in the history of mankind, there were no wars, and everyone was working in unison, at least for that moment.

However, when the sphere gave no reaction, but just kept growing, people got increasingly anxious. Military intervention was suggested, but not everyone could get on-board for that. So, it was decided to not haste, and instead focus on observing and not angering the Shape. The Shape seemed to be fine with that, although attempts of scientists to probe from nearby were met with subtle movements indicating they needed to get out. Also, the one person trying to take a sample of it was engulfed by the Shape, probably killing him on the spot.

However, more and more land needed to be evacuated to make space for the Shape. However, as it engulfed more towns, it became clear that the peaceful solution probably wouldn't help at all. Also, all attempts at communication had failed about as spectacularly than those of a bowl of spaghetti that tries to convince someone not to eat it. The strange thing was though, it didn't seem to want to kill people, it just kept growing. As time progressed, it even seemed to become more considerate towards people around it, only growing into areas that were already evacuated. A politician suggested to use this fact to our advantage, but this was shut down. This was probably a good thing,

because this may have cost us the goodwill this being seemed to have grown towards it.

A month or two later, it was decided that the peaceful solution was dead. A plan was devised to use military force to try to destroy it. It was argued that if this angered it, it would, in the worst case, merely fasten the destruction of humanity, whereas not acting now could remove the only possible chance we might have at attacking it. A plan was made to explode multiple hydrogen-bombs around the sphere, to damage it's outer shell, followed by a second round, to hopefully finish the job. Critics said this would not have any effect, since all physical objects seemed to be to the Shape were toys to play with. These words were ignored, because everyone else seemed all too happy with finally having a plan, and didn't want to get told that it wasn't a good idea.

So, a few weeks later, an attack was executed. The first bombs hit target, and the results were promising. The entity seemed to be hurt by it, and retracted somewhat. However, the second attack wave was struck from the sky. After that, the Shape started behaving irregularly. I thought it might feel conflicted about what just happened, because it knew why we were doing what we were doing, but still, we tried to kill it.

After that, the Shape started growing at a higher pace, and no longer seemed to be as considerate towards us humans. If people were in it's way, they would just get destroyed. It just seemed to want to keep growing, and if humans were in the way, that was their problem. It had tried being nice, and people didn't seem to respect it, so it had given up on that.

Two months later, most of Switzerland was gone, as was a part of France and Germany. Where used to be beautiful mountains was now a sphere made of energy. A decision was made to put up a final stand, and throw all weapons at it that humanity had available. Every army in the world prepared their weapon systems for a final stand. Since these Events would decide the fate of the world, I decided I wanted to see it happen from close by. Thus, I headed to a town that should be just outside the blast radius of the weapons that were planned to be used, and found a nice hill nearby, from which I had a good view over the Shape. I took a deep breath, and took a sip from the coffee I had brought with me. A faint smile appeared on my face, as I mentally prepared for the events that were about to unfold. I turned on my radio, to listen to the live broadcast of the fight that was about to happen.

From the radio I learned that the attack didn't go as smoothly as planned. They speculated that the Shape had learned from the previous attack. The the planes had taken off as planned, and the missiles had been launched. However, the Shape had prepared a reaction. It started to move wildly, causing the earth to tremor around it. It started out small, but it's message was nevertheless clear; it didn't want to get attacked again. Humanity decided, however that it wouldn't stand down this time either. If the shape couldn't be killed there and then, the fight would be lost forever. And, even though it was still mostly harmless, it was starting to increasingly take up space. Nobody wanted to figure out what would happen at the point where it engulfed the entire planet.

Thus, the Shape fulfilled its threat. As the missiles closed in on the Shape, the earthquakes started to increase heavily in magnitude. Most of the European continent was shaking at magnitudes unheard of. This caused major destruction throughout Europe. The Eiffel Tower's steel construction collapsed, killing hundreds of tourists below it. Pisa's Tower tumbled over as well. However, since the missiles had already been launched, there was no way to stop the attack. Thus, twenty minutes later, all nuclear missiles in the world hit the Shape; all within thirty seconds of each-other.

It seemed the Shape had learned from the last time it was attacked, and made a hole in its shape, to let the missiles through. Therefore, all missiles missed target, and instead exploded on impact with the ground. It managed to put all the energy of the missiles directly into the ground. This caused an earthquake of a magnitude never seen before. This earthquake caused damage to the Earth's crust. At that same point, the Shape started to push into the cracked crust, causing the Earth's crust to start to break. This caused a ripple effect, which basically made the Earth explode. From one moment to the next, the Earth stopped being, and instead got turned into tiny shards. Some of these shards still had buildings on them, or what was left of these buildings. Most buildings however, were not built to handle the stresses that the Event (as we got to call it later on) caused.

The Earth's surface started to split into smaller shards, with the magma underneath becoming highly unstable. Also, this event caused the portal between both worlds to widen, enabling the Entity to grow enormously in size. With that, its powers also grew substantially. The entity merged with the Earth's core, and took over most of its functions. It seemed the Entity was actually feeding on some of the energy in the world around it.

During this event, about half of humanity died out, with the number being higher in some areas and lower in others. The main factor for this seemed to be the quality of architecture, and if it was night there, or day. Quite a few people got surprised by the Event, and died of fires. Most of these fires were caused by secondary problems, such as electricity failures.

The number of deaths would actually have been a lot higher, were it not for the fact that the Shape seemed to find compassion again, and decided to try to help people. It seemed to think that people no longer formed a threat, and thus could be treated with kindness once more.

From written reports by others, and from the way my shard looks, I figure that the Entity must have gathered enough power to start working on changing the laws of physics. It seemed to have used these powers to the advantage of humanity. It obviously was quite shocked by the results of the actions that had happened before, and wanted to help out where it could. And, since it had obtained so much power from the Event, it could easily help. The extent of its powers seemed to have become almost limitless. It started bending the rules of physics, causing the shards to have individual gravitational fields. This meant that people could now also walk on the undersides of shards, and removed the risk of people falling off. Put in different words, every shard of the earth got

it's own miniature gravity field. This also gave people access to a lot more space per shard. Although the amount of space still wasn't much, it at least gave people some chance of survival. It also stabilized the positions of the shards relative to each-other. After that, it gently pushed people that were still stranded onto the nearest Shards. I myself however, got unlucky. I guess it must have been caused by me being near the center of the explosion, but I got stuck on a small rock, on my own.

In the first period, there were still moments where I could sometimes glimpse at the other rocks. Some of them seemed to contain buildings, and these looked like they could sustain life. However, after a while, the storm got more stable, and with that, I no longer even had sight on the rest of the world. Since that point, my communication options were limited to throwing things into the storm, and having things fall out of it. This is not a very controlled way of communication, but it will have to do.

I had been so wrapped up in thoughts, that I didn't notice it had become 'night'. Since it didn't turn dark, the first signal of it was the increase in wind velocity. I went inside, to get shelter, and started work on repairing some of the smaller things that got broken. I had never been good at repairing things, choosing to instead just throw them away. However, here, this wasn't really a choice.

Violet

Violet is one of these people where you wouldn't say her actions mattered much. However, she does really have a place in this story.

Violet Cross is my name. I'm a twenty-eight-year-old journalist for the New Times, the largest newspaper in the entire Confederacy of Places. I'm one of the few people that the Energy communicates with, and thus, I mostly function as it's eyes, ears and mouth. Nobody besides me knows about this though. It has been five years since the Energy entered our world, and I sometimes think it may have been a good thing.

The story about how I ended up in this position is quite interesting though.

Before the Event, my life was boring. I was an Internet celebrity, mostly writing about stupid, small things. I lived in a small apartment, in Islington, near London. I lived there with my cat *Meow*, and my boyfriend Charles Wilson. The apartment smelled of books and antiques, because both me and Charles loved collecting old things. Books, maps, and other antiques filled our house. There was barely any space left in our apartment to live in. Therefore, it was a small wonder that *Meow* rarely destroyed anything.

I still remember the day when the message came about the Entity. I was relaxing, binge-watching Friends, when suddenly the broadcast got interrupted for news. For a second this annoyed me, but then I saw it for the first time.

On the television, a giant Sphere was shown on the television. As they explained what had happened, my phone started ringing. It was Mary, one of my friends. We had been friends since primary school, and we had stayed in touch ever since. I picked up to hear her panicking on the other end of the line. She had just watched the news, and had started to panic. She asked me if this was the end of the world. I answered that I didn't know, as I had only just seen it on the news myself. I told her that everything was going to be fine, and that there was no need to worry about it too much. She didn't seem to get any more calm though.

At that time we were still calling it the Sphere, and unsure of what it was. To be honest, we still don't really know what it is, or why it is here, but at the very least, we have some of an idea of its capabilities. At that point, we didn't know anything about it, except for its shape.

I was working as a freelance writer, working for multiple newspapers. It wasn't a well-paid job, but the amount of jobs for someone with a journalist background was quite low at that point. I was mostly writing opinion pieces. I hated doing that, but finding work as a writer can be a challenge. I was asked by the Guardian to write an article on what people on the street thought about the Sphere. I hated writing these pieces, but

decided to do it anyway. These pieces were always easy to write; you start by making up persons. This is rather simple, since you're supposed to anonymous the names anyway. For instance, you could have a John Smith from Birmingham. Then, you make up opinions. This is even more simple, because people are surprisingly stupid and predictable. One person is mostly scared, one thinks we have an option to improve as humanity, and another person thinks we should go to war with it. I was done with my article before my cup of tea had become cold.

I cuddled Meow as I sent in my article. After that, I watched the news on the TV while enjoying my cup of tea. It felt surprisingly normal for the magnitude of the things that were unfolding. It was quite relaxing in a way to see the predictable panic on television. There was a strange suspense, because nobody really knew what was going on, and why. Besides that, after the initial shock of the Sphere existing, nothing had changed. Meow purred in delight, obviously loving the attention she had been given. Meow was possibly the one best-of because of the disaster.

The Sphere had, as of yet, not killed anyone, or even done major damage. It was just there, slowing ever so slowly.

The television broadcast started to get boring after a few hours. Most of it was scientist disagreeing about the nature of the Sphere. This made sense, as none of them had any idea what was going on, which put them on the same level as most other people.

Nobody knew anything about what it was, or why it was there. Even the most simple questions, such as the material it was made of came up empty. An attempt was made to use a robot to scoop up some material, but the robot broke as it tried to finish it's task, leaving a broken robot stranded there.

The only thing that was sure was that the Sphere was beyond anything that could have been made by a human, so it must have been like it should be alien. However, nobody saw it come from space, so it's origins remained a mystery.

I turned off the TV, and laid down in bed for a while. My thoughts started to dwindle. I wondered if it was a creature from another place. What if it's intelligent, and we could communicate with it? We could perhaps find out what it is, and why it's here. It had so far shown no signs of intelligent behavior though.

Still, having contact with such a being could be immensely intriguing.

I cooked dinner, while still thinking about it. After dinner, I realized my boyfriend hadn't come home yet, so I decided to call him and ask where he was. He told me he had forgotten about time while watching the news at work.

He was a maths teacher at a local high-school, and they had spent all of the day and evening watching the news. Sure, it's important to learn, but the Sphere's very existence was a shock to everyone. Most people didn't have a world-view that could easily incorporate a giant glowing Sphere. Neither religious people nor scientific people had space in their beliefs for a giant glowing Sphere to fill.

Over the next weeks, the entity started growing in size, people started to slowly

understand the scale of what was going on. Most people started to panic. Food got hard to get, because people started hoarding food.

Most people started to wonder if this thing is going to eat the whole world. That would mean the end of the world. Riots were raging for a while. After that, it got normal again, because the Shape was growing at a really low pace, and people can only stay angry for a limited amount of time. Thus, the world continued mostly as normal. The thing that intrigued me most of all though, was the fact that the shape had stopped being merely a Sphere, and instead had started to behave intelligently. It was on the news all of the time, people who managed to get away from the Shape, because the shape retracted one of it's arms to let them pass. It seemed as though it didn't actually want to hurt people, but somehow couldn't help it.

A couple of months later, it was decided that the time had come to wage war against it, because we couldn't just give up our planet without a fight. And, even though it wasn't directly showing signs of hostility, it was taking up increasing amounts of space. At this point, it had gobbled up all of Switzerland, plus some surrounding areas.

It still struck me as awful that our reaction to having an intelligent being at our doorstep was fighting it, rather than trying to come to an understanding. I tried writing my representative about it, but he didn't even find the time to reply. Thus, humanity went at war with the strongest enemy it had ever had. The results of this were predictable: destruction.

As the attacks started, the Shape fought back by causing major earthquakes. I was lucky to be walking in the countryside at that time, because the earthquakes destroyed my apartment building within seconds. I thought about my cat, and hoped he got out before the earthquake. That animal had a knack for somehow getting out of extremely dangerous situations unscratched, but this one was worse than any before.

I walked to the nearest building, looking for people that might need help. I found an elderly couple at their farm, which had caught fire. They seemed to be in shock, so I went to them to talk to them. They told me that farm had been in the family for two generations now, and that they had just finished renovating it. They got shocked more when they thought about their children, who were living in the city. As we were thinking about ways to figure out how to reach them, the Event started to happen. From one moment to another, the Earth seemed to just fall apart. It didn't shake much or hurt much, it was just as though the earth no longer was one thing, but rather a collection of separate pieces. We saw the horizon break off, about five hundred meters away from us. We laid down on the ground, contemplating our lives, as we awaited the embrace of death. However, that didn't seem to come. Instead, life just continued as though nothing had happened.

Bewildered by these events, we started to look around on our part of the earth, that had seemingly come lose. Besides the damage done by the Earthquake, not much had changed. Trees were still standing as they had been standing, and birds and butterflies still mostly flew as they always had done. In the distance, a lake was visible. Since the

edge of our shard was in the middle of the lake, it had drained quite significantly. The water level had dropped at least half a meter, revealing water-plants, and even some water-animals.

We walked by the lake, and went to the edge. We had a look at how the land around us was doing. Most of the ground seemed to have split up into shards, and most of it seemed to hover in the air. I couldn't figure out what kept us from falling, but I wasn't complaining about that. . Most people seemed to be lucky, and be on one of the parts, but some fell through the gaps. Also, some of the shards seemed to have fallen towards the core of the Earth.

I decided to stare down over the edge. This was probably a bad decision, since what I saw frightened me endlessly. The core of the earth was just visible down below, shooting out fireballs every time something fell into it. Or also, if someone fell into it. I fell to my knees, shocked again by the sudden realization of the scale of the disaster that had occurred. I threw a rock over the edge of the part of the earth we were now on. To my amazement, instead of falling down, it followed the curve of our shard. This bewildered me, because this didn't align with my view of physics.

I slowly got to my senses by observing the world around me. I was laying on a grassy part, near what used to be the edge of the farm of the two elderly persons. Near me was a patch of strawberries, which were probably almost ripe. July had just started, so it was the season for strawberries. I had gotten hungry, so got up and started collecting some of them, to share them with the elderly couple.

Some things never change: even after such an event, publishers still care more about reading statistics, than they do about journalistic integrity. Thus, even as the entire world has changed shape, opinion pieces are still a thing.

Most people would probably be frightened at this point, preventing them from functioning altogether. I however, was too overwhelmed by a feeling of wonder to feel fear at this point. So, instead, I started to walk around to observe my surroundings. I saw some rabbits running around, seemingly undisturbed by what had just happened. I wondered if perhaps being frightened by not knowing what's going to happen is perhaps a more human thing. I decided they probably didn't understand what had happened, and were just glad the earthquake was over. And, since the earthquake was over, from the perspective of the rabbits, everything had gone back to normal.

Then the a realization struck like thunder, all my friends may be on different rocks now. And: how is my cat doing? I stared blindly into the sky, overwhelmed by the events that had just happened. An explosion occurring in the distance brought me back to my senses. A building had just collapsed, and parts of it fell down.

I met again with the elderly couple, and we sat down under a large, old oak tree, and started talking. They were called Martha and Jeffrey Conway. Jeffrey said they had lived at this farm for over thirty years. They had three children, who all grew up on the farm,

which was now gone. They pointed at three of the trees that were standing near where the smoldering ruins of the house were. Martha explained that these trees were planted when each of their children was born. We all fell silent for a moment, thinking about the people we care about. I wondered where Charles was, and how he was coping.

As the rest of the day passed, some of the damage of the Event started to become clear. Some radio stations had resumed their services, and we could therefore get some idea of what was going on. The stock-markets had closed down, as had most businesses. Electricity networks and waterworks had been severely disrupted, with most people no longer having access to power and water. We could see people on other shards, and waved at them. The nearest shard was a few hundred meters away, so, building a bridge should be possible. Crossing directly obviously wasn't an option though.

By shouting, we were able to communicate with the people at the shard next to us. It seemed they didn't suffer major injuries either, but were still quite shocked by the events that had unfolded. Their shard was bigger than ours, and contained a few houses, which were still partially intact even.

We heard a buzzing noise overhead, and our eyes turned to the sky. There was a plane flying overhead. It was steering around, trying to find somewhere to land, but most airports were no longer really an option to land on. You could see from its flying path that it was very much flying on manual. That made sense, because no autopilots were built for a world like that. It left our view, without a landing spot in sight. We hoped, and Martha prayed for their safety.

A few hours later, we saw the first attempts of a government at sending aid. A helicopter flew overhead, and used speakers to ask us if we needed help. We messaged back that we were good, didn't have a water supply anymore. After that the helicopter quickly flew off. Other people must have had it a lot worse than we had it. The day after that, nothing seemed to be happening. We spent our day listening to the radio and talking to each-other. Somewhere in the afternoon, we decided to start to look for materials to build a shelter, or to start on a way to move from shard to shard. As we were doing this, we started to notice things were changing again. This time however, it was more gradual, and therefore also less destructive.

Over the next weeks, we were supplied with food and water, so we were able to sustain ourselves. We managed to get the solar-panels on the barn working again, which gave us minimal electricity supply, enabling us to recharge our mobile phones. The mobile network still wasn't really functioning, but being able to listen to my favorite music again really helped me. I also started to keep track of a diary at this point.

It seemed the Event had destroyed quite a bit, but life still was quite possible, at least, in our country. I don't even want to think about what must have been going on in the

lesser developed parts of the world though.

Then, suddenly, after about a month, a government helicopter landed, and some officials came out. They talked about their plans for the future. Apparently, a governing body was starting to be formed, and every Shard would be represented in it. Even though our shard only had three people in it, we were still asked to send a representative to the first meeting of a special council. The three of us quickly agreed that I would be the best one to go. I was asked if I minded to travel straight away, and I could think of no real reason to stay behind at that point. This seemed to be an opportunity to find out what was going on in the world, and to try to help rebuild society. As we flew through a more central location, I got a view of how the world was looking. Shards seemed to differ a lot in size and contents. Some were parts of villages, where others were had only grassland on them. Some did not have anyone living in it, and instead only had parts of forests in there, or grassland. About half an hour later, we neared a group of connected shards. I was told this was the new political capital. My eyes opened wide, because I had never expected an area to already be rebuilt that much. It seemed to be a connected mesh of shards, all filled with high rises, and buildings. All these things were connected by a network of bridges. From a distance, it looked like a spider web. The helicopter turned to move around some of the bridges, and landed at a huge beautiful building. We exited the helicopter and I was greeted by a friendly face. She introduced himself as Miss Walters, the chairwoman of the Council of Shards. She seemed to be a person not to get into a fight with. As the helicopter took off again, she explained that I just arrived at the Capital, and that I was chosen to represent the wishes of my Shard. The capital was merely called the Capital. It was a boring name, but at least it was clear. We entered the entrance doors and entered a hallway. The architecture of the building struck me with awe. On one end, it looked like it was designed with thought and care. The hallway was tall, and had huge pillars. On the other hand, the pillars were made of a multitude of different materials. But, what amazed me most was the amount of light that was available here. Our shard didn't have any glass still standing, so we were forced to board up all the windows, but here, there were numerous windows. We went through a second set of doors, and were greeted by a small envoy of people.

Since this left such an impression, I still remember exactly how they were standing that day, because they all made an impression in their own way.

The first one to greet me was Thomas Jenkins, who introduced himself as the Council's scribe. He seemed to me like a kind and trustworthy person. He told me that most of my task was to assist in finding solutions to problems shared by people living on the shard. He argued that we, the people living there, may already have solved quite a few of the problems other people were still dealing with. So, my task would be to be a part of a creative think-tank, until it was figured out what task would be most suited for me. My most likely assignment would be journalism, but they weren't a hundred percent

sure yet. The task would probably fit me, but there's only a certain demand for journalists. And, since I wasn't added to the Council because of skills, but rather, because my shard has a right to have one representative.

To the right of him was Anne Foreman. She was a strange one, because she sounded friendly, but there was something in her voice that made you feel uncomfortable, without knowing why. She would be the person showing me around here, until I was ready to find my own way. The two others, Alex and Jillian, were new people, just like me, and were also assigned to Anne as their guide.

Anne asked us if we were hungry; we all nodded affirmatively. We walked for a bit, and entered a mess hall. Here, we had a choice of food unheard of at my home. There were luxuries such as butter, and fresh bread. We filled our stomachs until we felt nauseous. After that, we were shown our quarters. We each had our own room. The room reminded me of my room during my year I spent at university. It was small, and minimally filled, but it felt cosy nevertheless. Also, it had proper central heating, and a window. The view of the window was quit spectacular, I had view over three of the bridges, as well as two other Shards.

I was asked if I had brought new clothes with me. When I answered I only took the minimal amount of required clothing with me, I was supplied with a bag filled with clothes. The luxury I was treated with at the same time made me feel delighted and uneasy. The main thought racing my thought is that I had much more than the people living outside the capital.

I was shown the way to the showers, and after the first proper warm shower in a few months, I joined the others again. We continued our tour of facilities. The next thing we visited was the archives. The archives were a location where most of the known data about the world was stored. This might sound like an odd choice, but the reason for this soon became clear. The archives contained the most complete database of people living on the Shards that was available. We were permitted to look up one name in the system, to see if they had already been found and registered. The system kept track of which people had been confirmed to be alive, and who had been confirmed to have died. Most people were still unknown though. My heart started to race, thinking of my boyfriend Charles. I asked them to look up if they had found him. They set out to work. This didn't seem to be a trivial task. Most computer systems had been destroyed by the event, because the breaking apart of the world had caused major power surges. Therefore, they needed to work with a makeshift computer-like system. After a while they came back, and told me they hadn't yet found him, but also didn't have any record of him having died. This however didn't mean that much, because most people were still missing. Still, I was painfully reminded of what I was missing. I wondered how he was doing, and if he missed me as much as I missed him.

I was too wrapped up in my thoughts to find out what the others had found out about their loved ones. After sitting there for a while, thinking of our loved ones, we moved to

the office area. We were shown our workspaces, and were told that our first task would be to describe our Shard and what facilities it had. We were also asked to describe what troubles it currently faces, and has faced in the past. I described the barn, the burned down farm, the lake, as well as the inhabitants of the rock.

After this task, we were given a presentation on the new government structure. We were explained that all old governments fell, because they no longer had the required resources to keep their organizations running. A helicopter hangar near what used to be London still had some operational helicopters, and had a fuel storage that hadn't ruptured yet. From there, a scouting operation was started to figure out if there was a place suitable for rebuilding a capital. A group of shards was found, that used to be part of the city centre of Murkwell, and construction began. While work had started on building a new capital, people were starting to get shipped in to work on figuring out how to run a society that's split up like this. Philosophers, Lawmakers and Mathematicians were sought out throughout the shards near the location of the to-be-capital, and these people were shipped in to start working on a new structure of leadership. They quickly decided that some sort of representation would be needed, but that full democracy would not be feasible, because of logistical problems. Also, keeping everyone happy would have meant spending too many resources short-term, and not having the resources left to actually rebuild the world. Temporary inconvenience was deemed less bad than extinction. They also agreed that the first step should be to get to know where resources are needed. The main cause of death after the Event was starvation, and thus was deemed the main priority. This problem was two-fold. Farms weren't able to produce effectively, because they lacked their materials. But, as importantly, the food produced wasn't easily transportable.

Repopulating farms and supplying them with the needed materials was therefore put at priority one, next to scavenging for resources. This left some ethical discussions: would the council be permitted to confiscate food to feed people who would otherwise starve? There didn't as of yet exist a currency to meaningfully trade with, and, without support of people, the council couldn't easily start one. Therefore, the council decided to get people from around the shards together, so the shards feel more involved in the Council, and believe in the power of said Council.

We were told that the Council would soon introduce a monetary unit to enable trade, and so they can start buying up the things they need. I wondered how fair it was that the Council just basically got all the money, but I wasn't sure enough about the concepts of economics to open my mouth, not wanting to sound stupid.

After this explanation, we were told about the practical structure of the Council. It's name is a misnomer, because it's not really a Council as such, but more of an enclave, put together to plan the future of humanity, and to keep some cultural development active. It's composed of lawmakers, architects, engineers musicians, journalists, writers, film producers, and quite a few other job titles you wouldn't expect to exist in a post-apocalyptic world. The purpose of these people is to help improve the lives of everyone

outside the Council. After placing us all in relevant teams, with me being placed in the journalist team, we went for dinner. Dinner was the next surprise, because, for the first time in an awfully long time, I had dinner in a proper restaurant. Although I really enjoyed this, my thoughts were with the people that had it less good than I have it. One of the people on the table seemed to have noticed. His name was Tom Winslow, and he was the editor for the newspaper I was assigned to working on. He asked me what I was thinking about, because it seemed I was lost in thought. When I shrugged and didn't answer, he told me that everyone at the Council feels like this, but that some luxury is needed to be able to work effectively. Also, since the population of the Council is rather low, the actual burden caused by us living in some luxury isn't that high. This gave me some rest, but it still didn't totally feel good to live like this while the world was still only just holding together.

My job at the newspaper involved talking to other parts of the Council, and writing down the progress they were making. My first day, I talked to a bridge designer. He had been working on a light-weight, easily constructible bridge-like system that could link shards up to a few hundred meters away from each other. This would enable connecting multiple shards together, increasing community sizes, and helping people meet people they had not had contact with for a long time. Since nearby shards almost always had been near each other on Earth, this would reconnect quite a few communities. The main challenges before this plan could be implemented were getting materials to where they are needed, and prioritizing construction. Two different link concepts were designed: a tower-like bridge, and a more spectacular design. The second concept used for linking shards was similar to something that had existed before the Event: a cable car system. The idea was to have a cable loop, with towers on two shards, and to put payloads on the cable, moving the cargo between them. The design was almost finished, but still needed to be reworked, keeping in mind the limited resources on the shards. I was explained that some resources were still scarce, and could only be used at critical places, such as the Capital.

I wrote an article, in which I explained the designed system in great detail, including the improvements it would make on the life of everyone. My writing was liked by my editor, and soon I was assigned bigger tasks. It became apparent that I was more suited for complex, philosophical topics, compared to lightweight stories about people meeting each other again. Some time later, I was assigned to shadow a group of scientists and philosophers, and write an article on their work. They were trying to find out what the Entity was, and what its motivations were. There were two main conflicting theories. The first one was that it was in fact an organism, just made out of different material. The other theory was that it was nothing more than a sphere of energy, and that all its reactions had been coincidental. The second theory made most sense to the scientists, the first one generally made more sense to the philosophers. We first spent a few days to get to know each other and decide what we would want to

set out to do. We were a group of five, two scientists, two philosophers and me, a journalist. The first scientist was called #name#, and seemed to be a shy, but intelligent one. He wasn't a person of many words, but it was clear that everything he said and did was well thought-out. #name2#, the second scientist, was more of the rock-star type of scientists. He knew a lot, and wanted to make that clear on almost every occasion possible. I didn't like him that much as a person, but it seemed he was quite easy to co-operate with, because he was, at least, very open. The philosophers were more of an enigma. #name3# and #name4# seemed like they were friendly people, but they were hard to read, and their motivations were quite unclear.

Our plan was finished a few days later, and after obtaining the required budget, we set off. Our mission: placing observation beacons around the Entity, and observing it from nearby.

We were airlifted by helicopter, and set off to first drop off some observation beacons on shards near the Entity. These shards seemed to be smaller than the ones nearer to the capital, and my home shard. After we did that, we were dropped off at a shard near the entity with some supplies and materials to build a shelter. We built our shelter, and settled for the night. For quite some time I couldn't fall asleep, thinking of what we could find out while being here. When I finally fell asleep, I dreamt the strangest dream I had had up to that point in my life. In the dream, I was hovering in the air, with a strange kind of mist around me. It was as though the mist was trying to communicate with me, but I couldn't really understand it. I asked it what it was. It didn't answer in words, but it did change shape. I couldn't understand what it was saying, but it was clear that it was trying to communicate. Thus, I continued by asking if it understood me. Somehow I knew from the shape-changes in the mist that it understood me. Then I asked it if it was the Entity, but before I could receive an answer, I was awakened by a large bang. An heavy object had hit our shard, just next to our makeshift shelter. The sky had turned a lot more stormy, and we could see quite a few large objects flying around in the sky around us. This showed the risks of being this close to the Entity, but at this point, there was nothing we could really do about it. Our helicopter flight back would only be there in around two weeks, and we had no means of communicating until then. I didn't dream I finally fell asleep again, and woke up somewhat rested the next day.

I spent most of the day observing people, and helping them by holding small things. I wrote some notes into my notebook, but nothing noteworthy happened during the daytime. The next night, I fell asleep almost instantly. I had a similar dream to last time, but it seemed as though the mist became easier to interpret somehow. It was as though it had find a way to talk to me. It told me I seemed like a reasonable person. I answered that I try to be. I asked it what it was. It told me it was a creature that wasn't from this world, but had somehow ended up here. I thought: if you're so big, then why did you destroy this much. It answered the question I didn't ask, by saying it needed to defend itself, and didn't know what else to do. It had also underestimated it's own powers in this world, because it's own world is really dissimilar to ours. Since that moment, it had tried to help people survive in the broken remains of their world. It explained that it had

chosen me as it's ambassador, if I agreed. Before I could ask anything, it told me I seemed like the kind of person to actually want to give it a chance, and to listen to it's explanations openly. Most other people seemed too preoccupied to be open to new concepts or ideas, it continued. I told it I would give it a chance, but that I would stop if I felt wrong about continuing doing it. It seemed to agree. I asked it if it had a name, it replied that it had one, but that it wasn't possible to pronounce it, because it's race doesn't normally use sound to communicate. In it's own world, there are more effective ways to communicate besides sound. It told me it would know how to reach me when the time was right, and I woke up as it became light.

The rest of that week passed in a flash. I wrote notes on the results of the scientists, and discussed the results with the philosophers, but there wasn't that much to discuss. Yes, it was a sphere, condensed with high amounts of energy, but nothing more could be said. I of course did not mention the dreams to the others. I didn't want to be viewed as a lunatic, not to be taken seriously. Thus, when we returned, the official report showed nothing of the only interesting thing that happened during our trip, but only showed limited measurement data. Still, our results were presented with a lot of spectacle. This bewildered me, because the results were barely even worth mentioning. We even got to present our results on television, where we were treated as though we had just solved world hunger. Actually, all we had done was proven that that giant sphere of energy indeed has quite some energy stored in it. By the way, television after the Event is not like it used to be; outside the Capital, newsreels are shown monthly, when the new supplies arrive. Radio-communications were largely impossible because of the way the new world was held together.

Three nights later, I had a strange dream again. The Entity told me it wanted me to collect information on a certain plan of the council. The council was planning the addition of some industry on shards near the Entity. The Entity wanted to know details, and reasons for it. In exchange, it said it would do a favor of similar size later. I didn't even care about that, because I was too intrigued in what such a being would want or need from me. I asked it why it would even be interested in this plan, it said it could potentially harm both it, and with it, all of humanity. I believed it at it's words, because I didn't really see a reason for it to lie at this point. And besides, if it were evil, it could kill us all in a heartbeat. I set off to find that information. Initially, I didn't get much, because it wasn't information on things I was supposed to be working on, so I wasn't granted access to said information. However, I knew someone who could know, Derryl. He was one of the people who went with us on our expedition. After-wards he worked on designing the new industry. I knew he wouldn't tell me straight away, but decided to try to convince him to tell me. I had a feeling he had fallen in love with me, and I decided that I could use that to my advantage. It was quite easy to get close to him. I started by showing an interest in his work, and soon he started to trust me. I think he might have fallen in love with me. I didn't do anything really amoral, but didn't do anything to

explicitly remove his hopes, even though there was no hope for him. I would never see myself fall in love with him. After talking a few times, he agreed to talk to me about the project he was working on.

He told me that the plans were to harvest energy directly from the Entity. Since it seemed to be composed of so much more energy than we could ever need, no objections were seen to this plan. The next time I had a strange dream, I relayed this information to the Entity. It reacted: "That's really bad. Even though you're not taking much energy, it may well be too much. I'm already spending quite a bit of my energy on keeping the world from falling apart even further. Taking away more energy would endanger me, and therefore, you humans. Construction cannot be permitted to continue." I asked it what it wanted me to do. It told me it didn't know, but the plan shouldn't go through.

I decided to write an article on the design of the new power plants. In the article, I mentioned that the technology behind them wasn't entirely clear yet, but that we were working hard on figuring out how and why it was going to work. I wrote in my article that there was still some doubt on the precise technical workings on it, and that some people feared it may cause the Entity to get hurt, or otherwise unhappy. After publishing this article, I got an angry phone call from my publisher. He said that I went too far by writing this, and asked where I even got that information. I replied that my sources wished to remain anonymous, but that I did my best to give an honest and fair description of the situation at play. My publisher didn't agree with me in the slightest, saying I may have jeopardized the position of the Council as a whole. He continued that, since I didn't mean it, it wouldn't have consequences. I reacted, by saying I did base it on genuine research, so that I would want to continue my research on it. He looked at me in surprise, but answered that that would be fine, as long as I ran any results through him first. I agreed to that. So, I started looking into theoretical physicists, trying to find people who actually had a fact based opinion on the matter. I found out that very few theoretical physicists live in the Capital, probably because their direct use is quite low. A group of three was put in charge of researching the Event, and the Entity. I had already had contact with some of them when I followed them for their research. After some preliminary interviews, one of them stood out as the one I should interview more. Stephen d'Moire was his name, and he had conflicting ideas about how the world currently worked. The others saw the Entity as a mere sphere of energy, abiding by the forces within our universe. He however, saw the Entity as an otherworldly being. He argued that the Entity was responsible for most of the changes to our world. And, he continued his reasoning, since it didn't do much more after that, we could see that as a sign of it already being around the maximum of it's abilities. This was similar to what the Entity had said to me. I didn't share that insight with the scientist, not wanting to come off as crazy. I did reply that I thought that could well be possible. I said that theory at least explained the change of the rules of the world.

I asked him about his opinion on the idea of getting energy out of the Entity. He got pale,

and said he wouldn't want to give further comment. I asked, off the record, why he wouldn't want to answer that question. He answered, after some thought, that he didn't want to lose his position as a scientist. I asked him if there was something he could say or do that would push forward my investigation, without compromising his position. He thought for a moment, and continued by saying there is an archive of measurement data, which can be interesting to look through. It contains notes from scientists, but these are not named, so they are anonymous. He winked as he said the word anonymous. After that, he said he thought it was best if I started with reading the notes on one specific set of measurements. I read through these measurements, and found scribbles next to some of the measurements. It was noted that the measurements showed values far outside the expected spectrum. It also showed that there seemed to be patterns within the measurements that couldn't be explained using the rules that had been defined for the behavior of the Entity. Instead, it seemed to behave in a way that seemed 'intelligent'. I smiled when reading this, because this is something I had known, ever since my dreams had started. I noted down my findings, and asked him to write a note, verifying my findings. Even though he didn't want his name to be involved with this, he did agree to put his name next to the fact that *some* scientist observed this. I took this evidence to my editor, who was surprised by it. He said that this could change the way we think about the entity. He said that, before continuing, I should talk to people above me in the scheme of things. I agreed to this, and he set up a meeting. I was scheduled to meet Miss Walters, a hugely important person within the Council. My appointment was put through almost straight away, and I could meet her the same day still. I spent the hours before the meeting meditating in the large park in the middle of the Capital. It had always been one of my favorite spots to calm down. It had everything you could want from a park: ancient trees, nice patches of grass, water features, and an abundance of birds and butterflies. Plus, it somehow always find nice there. The hours went by quickly there, and I headed to Miss Walters' office. It was in the main government building, on one of the top floors. When I got there, I was immediately let in her room; I didn't even have to wait a minute. In front of me was a woman who seemed like the type you had to take seriously. She greeted herself by saying her name was Miss Walters. I introduced myself simply as Violet. She showed a faint smile as I did so, and started the conversation by asking me what it was that I found. I told her I found out that there is at least one scientist that thinks that the Entity in the middle of our world is actually a being. She looked at me with mild surprise. I continued, saying that, if that's true, then producing energy based on it means hurting it. She told me that she understood it, and asked me what I thought about it. I looked surprised, because I didn't think I would be asked of my opinion. I answered that I knew that, at the very least, this scientist thought this was true. So, I argued, it would pay off to ask this scientist to come forward, and talk. I continued, saying I didn't think we should rule the idea as being impossible before having researched it. The world had changed so much that the existence of such a being wouldn't surprise me anymore. Miss Walters looked at me, and said she agreed with me, and thanked me for my openness. She said that it was rare for people to be honest and

open about their opinions in her vicinity, because people feared her. I replied that I didn't fear her, because, since I tried to help in the best way I could, I saw no reason for me to be afraid of her. I told her she didn't strike me as the kind of person that punishes for no reason. She laughed, and said she at least tried to be a fair person. We continued talking amicably for a while, and then got back to the point. She told me that she was grateful for me not giving up on my point, and continuing working. However, she continued, for now, I would have to let this go. She would take care of others researching this properly. I sighed, but promised to indeed do so. She ended our conversation, saying that she would find a way to thank me at a later point.

I remember reading of it on the news. Terrorists had attacked a school, killing dozens of children. The attack was quickly claimed by an organization called *the Voice of Reason*, an organization, which, till that point, was mostly involved in small-scale demonstrations and spreading of rebellious content. The news hit like a brick, and not merely because of the terrible act that was committed. The idea that some people would set out to want to destroy the world that had so painstakingly been built was beyond me. Sure, the Council had it's flaws, I thought, but you surely you can't argue it's results.

However, it got even more interesting afterwords. Some sources started to report internally that there were people within *the Voice* that claimed they weren't the ones responsible for these acts. This felt like an obvious way to peddle back on a mistake to me, and it only angered me even more. The anger turned to hatred. I wanted this group gone, and the people in it destroyed. Not just dead, but destroyed.

I asked for a task in the team around the research into this group. After some discussion, I was permitted in it. We spent months researching their behavior, and their actions, but we kept catching nothing. It was as though they were two separated groups. We brought this up once during a meeting, but were told by superiors that they had high-quality evidence suggesting otherwise. The evidence however was not important for this case otherwise, so the data wasn't shared with us. Although this may sound strange to you, this was normal procedure, to prevent multiple people from doing the same work. Our project on finding them had become unneeded however after a while, because they had turned themselves in. We were told that some coercion was used to get them to go here, but not much more was told us.

I was asked to meet with miss Walters, and that it was important. I was not told anything beyond that, but didn't need to, because she was quite famous within our line of work. Her ruthless attitude had more than once lead to results no-one else was able to achieve. She seemed to have no fear for anything, and to only focus on getting the result she wants. Being asked to meet her made me feel anxious, because I wondered what it is that she could have wanted from me. My heart was racing as I walked to her office. When I entered however, I was greeted by a kind and welcoming voice. She told me not to feel stressed, because this wasn't because something was wrong. Rather, she had a task which she thought I would be the right person for. She told me she had managed to catch the leaders of *the Voice*. She said that they were unwilling to cooperate. She told me that this

needed to change. A solution was already found, and I was needed in the execution of it. We were going to interview him for television, to slowly show him that we were actually not that bad.

I told her I would be interested in this task. I was told I would be prepped this afternoon, and that the first interview would start tomorrow. I prepared by writing down questions, and practicing sentences.

I remember the stress I had for the first interview. I would be talking to one of the world's biggest criminals, on live television. I wondered why he would even be given this chance. Something in me said even he should deserve a fair treatment, but I found that a hard thought to hold on to. Still, I would do my very best to make this set of interviews as insightful as possible.

William

For some people, being free is a convenience, traded in as a commodity when other things are more important. For me, it's the thing that defines me. In the old world, being unfree was just a fact of life. You had a job, a government, laws to abide by, and numerous other things that forced you to be something you weren't. It was as though we had built a world specifically designed to make us all feel miserable. The new world seemed to me like a good moment for change.

Oh, my name is William Fords by the way. You might already have heard of me, but don't believe all that you've been told. Like with everything, there's a lot of nuance to this story. Since my story is nearing its end, I think I'm entitled to try and explain some of the things that have happened in my life, and to repair my name.

Before the event I was a doctor, and had my own small practice. It perhaps wasn't the most spectacular work; I was 'only' a GP. However, for me, the choice between being my own boss and being a more glamorous doctor was obvious. It had never even been a question if I was going to work as my own boss, I had always known that was the way for me to go. The thought of having someone else tell me what to do had never struck me as something I could put up with.

I had always hated that others would trade in their personal freedom for convenience, or security. I viewed it as one of the main reasons for the raging depression and general unhappiness in the civilized world. The event seemed to me like a good moment to enable others to have this freedom. It would give the world a soft reset, and therefore enable people to rethink of decisions they had previously made.

The event had split about half of the village I lived in onto one shard. Therefore, I lived with around a hundred people on a Shard.

In the beginning after the event everything seemed to be all-right in this aspect. It seemed that people were doing what they wanted, and everyone seemed to generally be better off than before. Sure, there was hunger, there was thirst, and basic facilities were scarce. However, people had, for the first time in centuries, time for their families and for their hobbies. It seemed that, in general, people got a lot more time for themselves.

About six months after the Event, we were first greeted by Council officials. Most people on our shard seemed to welcome them with open arms, especially after they announced they were starting to design a bridge-system to connect shards. They also permitted people to send letters to nearby shards, which were delivered by helicopter. I myself however, wasn't too impressed. Sure, they had managed to get helicopters up and running again, but that hardly seemed like a way to qualify as being an official to me. Besides, I think I wouldn't be liked there anyway. Therefore, I decided that this would not be the time to start my fight for change. So, instead, I sighed, and awaited the right time.

For a while, it seemed the Council was actually doing a good job. Perhaps I had been wrong to be instantly distrusting. We were getting supplies of increasing quality, and were told the bridge design was making good progress. They started construction some time later, and in almost no time, a bridge was finished to the shard next to ours. The technical amazement didn't even end there. On that shard, they started the construction of a transportation station. It was obviously based in design on a base-tower of a cable-car system. A long, continuous cable was laid between our neighboring shard, and the nearest inhabited shard next to it. The building itself was built to look stunning. It had white walls, a giant entrance gate, and halls that looked like they were part of a 19th century railway station, instead of the halls that would be built by a society that lived in the ruins of a world that once was. It was obviously made to show off the technical capabilities of the Council. But, we could hardly complain, since they were rebuilding so much of our world. And besides, who dislikes a beautiful building. Besides, it's not like you can eat rocks, anyway. After it was finished, we were given a tour through the facilities, to show the way it worked, and what would become possible with it. From the entrance, first you moved through the ticketing area. This contained a few ticket offices, and a ticket barrier where the tickets could be checked. From there, you entered the main waiting room. This room had comfortable chairs, proper lighting, and an observation deck, giving a nice overview of the town. It also had a bar, which served luxurious food and drinks. We were explained that transport would be very expensive, since the system has really limited capacity. They said they were working on a variation with higher capacity, but that would require higher power usage, and more complicated technology. Thus, that technology was still far away. After that, we were showed the departure area. It had two platforms, one for each side of the circular cable. Cars can be coupled and decoupled to the cable. If no car is added, a counterweight can be added instead. It also had a separate entrance for cargo loading and unloading. Finally, we were showed a passenger vehicle. It was of quite simple design, having a few seats, a toilet, and a bit of stowage for luggage and supplies for during the trip. I think we were all thinking of how amazing it would be to travel on one of these pods.

When it opened, however, it wasn't taken in service for regular passengers. This was blamed on the fact that the capacity was still quite limited, especially for passengers. What made matters worse was that only one passenger cabin was available on the route. Since the speed of the system was limited by the fact that it had to overcome gravity, a single trip on the system would take at least eight hours. Therefore, only people with a good reason were permitted to travel on the system. The system was put to good use for cargo and mail though, although the usage was still not fully opened up. Instead, the Council decided what cargo would be permitted on-board of the system, based on what was important in other parts of the world. This seems sensible, when you think about it, because the system's capacity is really limited, meaning only cargo should be transported that has merit at the other end of the line.

However, a few months later, it started to change. The Council kept asking us if we had people of certain qualifications. At first the Council wanted opinionated people, to help

shape the concepts that would hold the new world together. Later, they wanted specialists, such as architects, engineers, and other types of specializations that would not have much merit on the shards themselves. These people left using the cable car, and were never seen again. We received messages from them, telling us that they were doing fine, but still, none of them returned.

I know this sounds harsh to say about a group of people that quickly rebuilt society, and saved many people in the process, but the fact that they stepped in this quickly and rigorously meant that nobody even had the time to think about how they would want the world to be. They were simply presented with a new government; a new upper class. And like the sheep most people are, they complied without even thinking about it.

As time progressed and the world started to take a new shape, we learned more about the outcome of the Event. It became clear however, that most people hadn't made it. Estimates were that, in our region, about 10% of all people had died during the disaster. This number is quite low, mostly caused by high quality architecture and a general lack of geographical instability.

The real shock however was that, after the disaster, more than half of all people had died from starvation. Most shards simply didn't have food supplies available, and there was no transport. So, for months, most people were without access to food supply, which of course wasn't possible. Nobody in the world before the Event had kept the possibility of the Event, or something similar to it, in mind. The Council promised improvement over the next period, and it seemed that, after the introduction of the cable car, no food shortages occurred anymore. So, at least, from that point on, our lives stabilized, and the fight for food was over.

Over the years after that, it became clearer and clearer that the new powers-that-are had just as little interest in personal freedom and democracy as the ones before the Event. It was obvious that no lessons were learned, and the opportunity was not taken to build a nicer world to live in. Even worse, even the limited transparency of the world before the Event was totally lost, because the new Council had none of the control methods that the previous governments had. There were no laws giving citizens insight into the decisions of the government, or public information. There were no elections, no political parties. The law itself wasn't even fully available. Instead, as the Council put it, the law was based on common sense, so if you followed that, you should be safe.

During these years, I had gathered a small group of friends around me, and they were convinced of my cause. We had bonded through sports, and later through philosophy. We were a group of four : A, B, Maggie .., and myself. We started out as just a philosophy group, but it turned into more later. As time progressed, the council seemed to become more and more stringent about their rules. It seemed they got more and more concerned with keeping their own position, and less concerned with the lives of the people not living in the capital. Freedom of speech got abolished at some point, because criticism of

the Council could lead to the destruction of humanity as a whole. They were, of course, the only thing keeping us all from falling into the abyss. The four of us heavily disagreed with this point of view, and started plotting a way to protest. We planned carefully and worked anonymously, dropping off leaflets, and other similar strategies. After a while however, Maggie got sloppy. He had released a publication under his own name, openly criticism the Council's decision to prohibit public rallies. Three days later, a helicopter, because the Council wanted to speak to him. He was never heard of after; it was as though he had never existed. These events changed something in our group. It showed to all of us that we weren't just a group of people with an interest in philosophy. We were a group of people that wanted things to change in the world. And of course, the powers-that-are didn't want that. We decided that, even though we lost one of our friends to the government, we wanted to continue. We wanted to move forward. Therefore, we wanted to become a political group. We decided to call ourselves *the Voice of Reason*, or *the Voice*. Before the Event we would have been a political party, but this wasn't an option. Our first goal was to figure out what the current structure of power was. This turned out to be more difficult than anticipated. It seemed that great care was taken to prevent people from knowing too much of the council, and how it works. Yes, we were 'represented' by our own representatives, but we had no way to know what they were actually working on there. At this point, we also weren't sure if they were actually evil, or merely strict, because they wanted to keep the world turning. Well, that's a figure of speech that no longer applies, but still. We therefore decided to give them the benefit of the doubt, and to wait and see what happens. However, when no meaningful information was shared from the council to our shard for around a year, we decided it was enough. We started to spread leaflets, telling people about how little we knew about the Council. For a while, this was met with limited to no reaction, but slowly we started to get noticed by people. Our points started to be taken more seriously. The Council must have noticed at some point, because we were invited for a conversation with one of their representatives. We were given assurance that we wouldn't be harmed, and decided to trust that. We met at a small pub, in a private back-room. The person who met us was Maggie, the former member of our group, that got arrested by the Council earlier. She had become a member of the council responsible for maintaining political support. She told us that our views had become known in the Capital, and wanted to explain why they did not align with reality. She explained that the world currently lacked resources to work as a full democracy, but that some higher-class people are needed to improve the world for everyone. That's why the capital exists, and that's also why people outside the capital have no say over what happens there. Simply put, it's the view of the Capital that it's in the best interest of everyone to live in comparative poverty and allow the Capital to exist. Giving people a right to vote on that, or generally know that would cause unrest, which would lead to further harm to everyone. Although we listened kindly, it became obvious that she was indoctrinated there, because her views were obviously flawed. The discussion continued for a while, but all that seemed to happen was that both parties got increasingly agitated and annoyed at the, to them, obvious incorrectness of the statements

of the other party.

When our group had grown enough, we decided we wanted to travel around, and talk to people on other Shards. The cable-train system had just been extended to a shard near ours. Thus, after we got off of our shard, we would be able to travel around comparatively easily. The other shard was only a few hundred meters away, and a bridge existed to head to it. It was quite a climb, because, as though it looked like a normal bridge, it was actually more like a tower. At the halfway point the gravity fields shifted, and from that point on it was down the stairs.

When we got there, we found out passenger service was still limited to need-to-use-basis. There were no options to buy tickets, not even for high fees. Council officials needed to approve of your travel, and we would never get that approval. We didn't want to get sent back just because of that though. In the end, we found a deceptively simple plan. We would act as though we got stolen from, and our documents got stolen. We were looked at weirdly, but, since there was no way for them to verify documents, and verifying this with a central authority would have been complicated, we were allowed on board, but only for one single hop. We entered the departure building, which wasn't much more than two elevator doors, one per cable. After a long wait, the doors opened, and we were permitted into the vehicle. It was very similar to cable-cars as used in mountainous regions on earth. However, it had air-seals on it's windows, because some of it's route has no significant atmosphere outside. The doors closed, and we were off. The ground underneath us got smaller and smaller, as we moved through the space between the shards. For the first time since the Events, we were traveling a significant distance. The journey was slow, and shaky, but it was incredible. As we neared the middle of our route, gravity started to shift. It started to decrease noticeably. We all started to float through our cabin, and started to stare at the Entity, which had taken up the spot of where the Earth's core used to be. In this silence, we had time to think. I thought about how much we still needed to do to get anywhere. I smiled in determination at the thought of this. Here, in our isolation, it seemed we could change the world.

Four hours later, we arrived at our destination. We walked around first, observing the area. It looked like it was a part of a small city, but with a lot of things destroyed. It looked like it had been repaired with more love than materials. We looked for a place to get food, and found a small bakery. They looked at us as though they had seen a ghost. We explained that we had traveled here. We were asked why we were permitted to travel, and we answered that that was a secret. They looked at us with faces of doubt, but didn't ask further questions. After we paid, we continued our walk through town. We saw that it had somewhat restored itself, and economy was somewhat working. The cable-cars must have brought in some of the required food and materials. However, as we started to talk to people producing things, we noticed a recurring theme. The Council had a monopoly on transportation, and abused that to demand low prices, with local industry barely making a profit at all. For all intents and purposes, it was slavery, since people weren't permitted to travel, and weren't able to change what they were working on.

We talked to more people, until we had a good image of what was going on in this town. Then, we started spreading our message, which mostly was about personal freedom, and the idea that a government should be answerable about the things it's doing. People seemed to be mostly welcoming to our ideas, and cheered to us. They asked us what we were planning to do with these ideas. We told them we didn't know yet, but we wanted at the very least to force the transportation system to become more open to trade, and transport. We talked to workers of the cable cars, and they agreed to letting us use the messages they use to transfer information on the workings of the system. Basically, every car on the system has a small container used to put working hours in, as well as planned disruptions. The backside of the documents were not used for normal payload, and therefore they were used mostly for personal information and jokes. We asked them if they minded us taking half of that space to build a cross-shard messaging system. They told us they didn't mind, as long as they could also sometimes use it. We set to work on a simple protocol of a communications network. For this we needed two main things: a design for the messages, and a layout of the entire network. The latter was easily available, by reading the newspaper archive, since the Council announced every new connection with pride. The former was finished a few days later. Simply put, the first line contained the destination station, and person, and the rest of the document was kept as payload. The stations along the line would have maps of the network at their stations. The design of the system was propagated through the network in the next couple of days, and after that we had a working network. We used this network to spread information on trade opportunities, as well as politically charged speeches. For quite some time, this system worked unnoticed. A few weeks later, a strange message arrived at our station. It was addressed as: to all stations, to the leaders. It was given to me personally. I opened it. It was a message from the Council, which had figured out our system. Someone must have snitched about it's existence. We were told to stop our little rebellion, and get back in line. If we did that, nothing would happen. Otherwise, they would start arresting everyone who had assisted in this secret system. We decided to stop using the system, and look for an alternative. We did not however disband our organization. We decided that if the Council acted upon their threat, it would be blood on their hands, not on ours. Besides, we didn't see them actually make good on that threat. Even though we stopped our communications system, we continued all our other activities. We talked to people, and tried to convince them of the importance our mission. The messaging system had already done it's job and our message had been spread. It seemed nothing could stop us anymore.

Then, as we were walking cross town, someone slipped an envelope into my hands. It contained a letter, and a set of photographs. The letter explained that we had failed to us that we had failed to turn ourselves in, and therefore, the people who helped us had been punished. It showed pictures of people from our shard, our friends, being rounded up. The pictures got increasingly gruesome as we looked further into the pile of pictures. Further into the pictures it showed our homes, on fire. The last image of the set shocked us all. It showed the execution of six friends of ours. When we looked at that image, we

fell silent, first in grief, and later in anger. The thought of others having to suffer because of our fight struck us as unfair. However, we concluded that this wasn't our fault. We didn't decide to punish us through the hurting of other, the Council had decided to do that.

The next day, we held a ceremony for our lost friends. We stood in silence around a fire we made to commemorate them. After that, we continued our efforts. We decided not to let their deaths be in vain. The actions of the council made us realize how badly a revolution would be needed. We decided to double down on our efforts. However, we agreed that violence would not be the solution, since that would invalidate our mission as a whole.

This act of violence split our community. Part of it got too scared, and left. The rest only got more invested in our case, because they had now seen the importance of it. With our efforts increased, we managed to become quite famous. We managed to again set up a transportation system. This time, we used the transportation of coffee packages as a medium. This was easier to manage, since there were fewer people involved in it. We had already established a dictionary of codewords in the era of our previous system, and used this to verify which shards had people there that we could trust. Besides, the new system no longer was traceable, meaning it was no longer clear who was involved in the production and propagation of messages. More and more people started to see our effort, and supported us. We were planning to slowly extend our activities, and try to actually get actively involved in the politics of the Capital. We thought we would have to be given a spot there, because of the size of our movement.

About a month later though, everything changed in a single moment. Terrorists had attacked a school in a big town, killing quite a few children there. Everyone was disgusted by this news, including our organization. We believed in change, but we didn't believe in violence. The newspapers, however, claimed our organization was behind the attacks. At that time, we weren't sure if a member of our group had broken our rules, or if we were actually being framed. Although we vigorously defended ourselves, it lead to us being viewed as a horrible attack, instantly losing us the goodwill we long spent to collect. Our name had become connected to violence, rather than friendly political critique. Most of our active members left, leaving only the core of the group, and the people who thought violence could be a valid solution.

From here on it went downhill quickly. Our group members got harassed in the streets, and any attempt of them to defend themselves spread as more signs of violence being used. We lost almost all of the support we had managed to get behind us. This, among other things, meant we could no longer send out messages. Therefore, we no longer had a means to spread our arguments.

To make things worse, news came in that a person was arrested, who claimed to be involved in our movement. Intriguingly, I had never heard of him. To be fair, we tried to work in cells, to prevent a single Council spy to be able to destroy our entire movement. Thus, he could very well be right about having been a part of our movement. Although he claimed that our organization was planning on the destruction of the Council, and the

world it had built, we still hadn't found any evidence of our involvement. We thought it to be unlikely that people would be involved with us if they wanted that, because this was against our main goals and beliefs. However, a single rogue cell could easily become a terrorist organization. Therefore, we decided to change our organization. We decided to shrink to a smaller group of people, with only people in there that I personally trusted. After that, we stepped up our game. We still condemned violence, but were no longer opposed to more disruptive demonstrations. We started with a sit-in at a central square in one of the bigger towns outside the capital. We simply sat there with a big group, and afterwards we spread leaflets with information. We decided to only do this for a limited amount of time, in order to be gone again before we could be taken in. Even though we were perceived as a public enemy, the government was still spread too thin to really actively fight us. This is of course the advantage of the underdog, you can hide anywhere. So we hid, we hid, and we promoted. We didn't really use our brand anymore, because it was destroyed quite effectively. Instead, we just told people stories, and got them to think.

A couple of months later, things started to go wrong. Suddenly, leaflets were spread by the government, about a price being put on information on the whereabouts of some people. It stated that you would get rewarded hugely for it, and if you choose not to share information you had, you would be punished for it. The list of persons contained most of the important persons within our group. It also explicitly stated that if we turned ourselves in, we the rest of our group would be spared. If not, then we would all be considered enemies of the state. Luckily, no images were available of us, so we still had some time to come up with a reaction of our own.

We debated it, and decided to not take the obvious options given, but instead take a third option. We were planning to head to the Capital in disguise, and try to talk reason into the people there. We were perfectly aware that this would be our final act, but we were willing to risk it. We wanted the people there to know what the people outside the capital were thinking. We had already made plans to enter the Capital beforehand, because the idea of the government finding out about us, and us needing to step up our game had always been in the back of our minds. In principle, the Capital isn't even hard to reach. You just have to travel to one of the four Cable Car stations with connections to the Capital, and take a Car from there. Of course, you do still need the required paperwork. The real challenge is obtaining that paperwork. We had one last drink with our friends, in which we made the rest promise to continue our efforts after we had gone. **Section?** We then arranged with one of our contacts to get passes for the special Cable Car towards the Council. We then silently entered the station. Our tickets were checked, as were the additional documents we required. After some cross-verification, we were let through into the main waiting area. We already thought the other cable car stations were needlessly luxurious, but compared to this one, the other ones were mere bus stops. The hall was at least fifteen meters tall, and had pillars made of marble. Or at least, they were made of something that looked like marble. It had chandeliers hanging from the roof, with numerous electric lights. The temperature was kept under control by an air

conditioning system. We sat down on a set of armchairs. We were greeted by a friendly lady, who asked us what we wanted to drink. When we looked weirdly, she exclaimed that drinks were included here, as long as we didn't go overboard. I asked for a glass of water, the others went with beer. I wanted to stay sharp, because I wanted to think on the journey that was ahead of us. Time passed quickly as we enjoyed our drinks in this marvelous waiting area. Still, after about an hour, I got bored, so I decided to walk around through the waiting area, to see how much it had. It seemed to be designed with appearance at higher priority than practical comfort. Most chairs seemed to be designed with photographs at higher priority than the comfort of sitting in them. In one corner, I found something that bewildered me most of all. I found an old arcade machine. To me, this felt like the ultimate luxury. Computers had basically gone after the Event, because, during the aftershocks of the Event, Electromagnetic Pulses went through the atmosphere, killing most electronics. This also killed all radio-based communications. Even now, far after the Event, there's a weird random electromagnetic field, making most electric communications impossible. Thus, finding a computer that is solely in use for games seemed like ultimate luxury to me. The game I could play on it seemed to be from before the Event, because it was a racing game. The concept of a car had become obsolete after the Event, because the shards were too small to have use for personal transportation on them. Bikes were still popular, but anything else had basically disappeared. Cars were only used for fire brigades, and trains were only still in use in some mines. Basically, the only type of transportation that hadn't suffered from the Event was the cable car.

After losing two hours playing the game, one of my friends joined me, telling it was just about time for boarding. I sighed, and shut down the arcade machine. We went towards the boarding area, where we were met by some friendly people. After waiting a few minutes for the boarding to start, we were let onto the marble staircase towards the entrance to the vehicle. We had a second class ticket, which meant a four-person compartment within the vehicle. The compartment wasn't big, basically consisting of four tiny bunk beds and a tiny area in the middle. The area in the middle was only there so we could enter and leave our beds. Still, it was nice to have a separated area within the vehicle. This allowed us to relax. After we settled in for the twelve hour long flight, we talked for a bit, and then relaxed, while looking out of the window. We saw the nebula's of the space between the shards, probably for our last time. We saw different shards pass by, and wondered who was living there. We wondered if they had a happy life.

At this moment, you may wonder why I decided to go. I get your feeling, because, at this point, this basically became a suicide mission. I became a martyr of a movement that no longer had much backing. Truth is, to me, this felt like my last stand, my last stand to prove my right. If not to the world, then, at the very least, to myself.

We woke up about an hour before arrival. The capital was just getting in sight as our breakfast got served. We drank coffee while gazing upon the Capital. It seemed our ideas

about the luxury of the Capital weren't hyperboles, but that it was actually that rich. We saw multiple high buildings, full of glass windows. When we got closer, we saw that the capital was interconnected by an intricate network of bridges. These bridges all looked amazing individually, and as a mesh, it looked almost like a network of synapses. It surely felt like this was the high-point of society. More details became visible over time. We saw people, everywhere. People were walking around, eating, dancing, working, and generally, living. This place looked like the world from before the Event. We were told to prepare for disembarkation. We washed and clothed ourselves, and headed for the exit doors. A few minutes later, we arrived at the Capital. The building on this side was of similar glamour of the one we had departed from; perhaps even more beautiful. It had four different lines coming from it, and had two giant waiting rooms. We didn't have to go to them, because this was our arrival station, but it still gave us chills just to gaze on them. We gazed on the platform where we just arrived one last time, and exited the terminal. I was humoured by the fact that we, perceived public enemy number one, were just walking through the Capital without anyone even noticing us. We enjoyed our walk through the capital, looking at all the highlights of the Capital. After that, we looked for a point of interest to start a speech. We found one at a main square. Here we set up our simple speaker system, and placed a soapbox for me to stand on. People's eyes turned to us, because it became obvious we were not from around here. Someone shouted that we were terrorists, and everyone went silent. They all seemed struck with terror, as though they saw their lives flash before them. As we started our speech, you could see people get more relaxed by the second. They expected to have met their maker by this point, and instead, they were greeted by a political speech. I took a deep breath, and started my speech. The people around me all turned to watch me talk.

I had the entire speech preprepared, and written out. I naturally didn't need the written-out version, but nevertheless it was a nice thing to have with me. For your interest, here is a copy of the speech:

~~~~

*Dear citizens of our beloved Capital,  
We, the Voice of Reason, have come here to tell you our story.  
We are a group of people, who wanted a better world.  
We wanted freedom and transparency,  
And prosperity for everyone.*

*But, as we tried to talk about this view,  
We were met with hostility,  
Our name name was crushed,*

*We never answered the violence subjected to us,  
we never got angry when crimes were committed in our name,  
we never even reacted when our friends were killed,*

*when you all killed our friends*

*However, now it has to come to an end.  
We will no longer fight you,*

*We have given up*

~~~~

The crowd stayed silent. There was no applause, but also no boo-ing. All we could hear was the sound of birds chirping, other than that, pure silence. It was as though the people on the market had just frozen in place, either out of fear or surprise. After a moment, it became clear that my speech hadn't made any impact, because everyone just switched back to doing what they were doing. Then, four policemen turned up out of nowhere, and asked us to come with them. We didn't put up a fight, but silently followed.

We were taken into a back-alley, and there a police vehicle waited for us. We entered silently, and took a short drive to a huge building. It seemed ominous and somehow really uninviting. We entered through a set of side-doors, and walked into a long, and tall corridor. It was lit only by indirect light from the ceiling, making it feel quite dark and moody. It felt reflective of the foreseen future. We were taken into separate rooms. When I entered the room where I was taken, I saw that it was a cell of sorts. I was quite surprised at the level of comfort; it was higher than anywhere I had lived since the Event. I had a proper mattress, electric lights, a water tap (with hot water!), and even a radio and television. The room even had a proper glass window, albeit with metal bars, to prevent escape. I laid down on the bed, and tried to rest for a moment. However, not even ten minutes later, someone came in.

She seemed like the type to be a high-up person. I always felt that woman at the top almost always have the same stereotypical appearance and behavior, and she exactly fit that. She introduced herself as Miss Walters, head of political affairs. She told me that I had made a wise decision by coming here, because this had saved us both a lot of grief. There was a strange, unfriendly smile on her face. It seemed as though she was enjoying this moment. I decided it was probably best to remain silent. She paused for a moment, as though she was expecting me to interrupt, but I didn't answer. She continued: "You know, you could have had a wonderful life here. Someone with your ideas and with your strength of reasoning would have been a great asset. You could have helped create great things. But no, you had to play revolutionary. Do you really not see it? We have rebuilt part of this world, and we will rebuilt the rest of it as well. While you guys were bickering about freedom and civil rights, we designed the future. In a couple of decades, we will have built a new society, better than any society before that. And, at that time, would have been the right moment to even start thinking about civil rights." I asked if she believed what she was saying, or that she was just telling me the same propaganda they also told everyone else. She replied: "Of course I believe in this idea, I *made* this idea a thing. Besides that, you should really just look at the results. Barely anyone is dying of starvation anymore, and we are slowly rebuilding communities. The world is

starting to move forward again, and people are starting to have hope for a future again. We're working on solving every major crisis in the world. We built the basis for a transportation network, meaning people can transport goods around our land. Therefore, people no longer die of starvation, or of the lack of medicine. We're also working on putting in place an education system, meaning children can learn again. Besides that, we're working on a power network. So, again, we have been too busy working to think about smaller things." I sighed and replied: "What did you expect us to do though, wait, and allow you all to get wealthier every day, on our backs? ". She smiled back and said: "Is that really how you think about us? Pity. I hoped we could still come to an understanding. But if it has to be like this, then there's no point in continuing. Your trial will start tomorrow." She waited for a few seconds, as though awaiting a response. But I had never been the kind of person to give in to threats, and this wasn't the moment to rethink my character traits. Then, she left, closing the door behind her.

I was alone again. I this time had time to properly observe my surroundings. The room was actually quite minimally constructed, with nothing in it making it feel homely. It seemed it had been built by ticking off the boxes with respect to comfort, but without any consideration for the comfort of the person living in it. For a cell, this may have seemed naturally, but, for what features it had, it really didn't feel like it. I decided to just watch television. It had a single channel, called *the Station*. It was nothing like I remembered of television before the Event. Comedy had been replaced with programs on the many things the council had achieved. I started to notice a trend: every small thing achieved was presented as though it was a Nobel Prize winning new idea. Well, technically, quite a few of them were, because the Nobel Prize was continued, and given out in the Capital. So, it seemed to go without saying that research from the Council would be highly ranked by them. After that, a music program came on. I seemed the music taste had actually taken a turn for the better, with classic rock and blues-rock being among the more highly ranked things. It generally seemed the entire council had a longing to go back to the sixties and seventies of the last century. At this point, I started to wonder about the choices I had made. Was it really worth it to keep on fighting, even though I had already lost?

A few hours later, I was brought food. It was a simple, but nevertheless complete meal. After dinner, I felt tired, and decided to try to get some rest. I fell asleep almost instantly, and was awakened the early next morning, for breakfast. As I was eating my breakfast, I wondered what the future had in store for me. She mentioned something about a trial, but I didn't really have faith in it being a fair trial by any standards. So, I prepared for the worst.

Two guards came after breakfast, and ordered me to come with. It seemed they knew I wouldn't be able to get anywhere anyway, because they didn't even bother restraining me in any way. First I was taken through an infinite-seeming labyrinth of corridors. Every corridor looked similar, but somehow distinctly different. The lights seemed to differ in design per hallway, as well as the materials used for the walls and ceiling. None of it looked pleasant though. After walking for a few minutes, a door was opened, and I

was told to enter. I did so, reluctantly. I entered an office room. It was lavishly set up, with a nice, old, wooden desk, and a heavy desk chair. The room had a window, giving a view over one of the main plazas of the Capital.

I was met by miss Walters again. She told me she was willing to give me another last chance. She would give me public interviews, broadcast on live television. Since it's live, I'd be permitted to say whatever I want. If I after 10 episodes managed to convince people, I'd get a position as a writer within the government. If not, my live would be forfeit. I thought about it for a moment, and agreed. It seemed like the only option I had, so it would have to do. I was moved to a different room. I still didn't have a window without bars, but it was actually designed to look nice, and be a generally nice place to stay in.

I was told later that my first interview would be in a week's time, and that there would be six interviews in total, all one week apart. After that, I would stand to trial. My attitude during the interviews would be taken into consideration during the trial. This meant essentially that I had a chance to save my own skin, by showing remorse. I wasn't sure what to think about that yet, but had a week to think about it. I was brought back home, and went to bed. After laying in bed for a few hours, I finally fell asleep.

John

The time has come for me to tell you of my personal story. I may not be the most important person in this story, but, since it's my story to tell, I should properly introduce myself.

My name is John. I am not that important, but I nevertheless want to tell you my story. I was only a few years old when the Event happened, so my story differs quite a bit from how others remember it. My memory is highly personal, and not very concise, but nevertheless provides an intriguing additional perspective to the Event. As a warning, I don't know what part of this information was my memory, and what part was told to me later.

Before the Event, I lived alone with my mom. I had never met my dad, because he had left my mom before I was born. My mom told me he wasn't a nice man, and that I wasn't missing anything by not having him around.

I came home after school. I was playing with my toy trains. The people here needed me to go where they want to go. My train brought them to where they want to go. As the train made it's fifth round around the city, something strange started to happen. The rails were shaking. The people on the train were scared. The train derailed. The people in it started screaming. The train stopped, and the people got out. Most of them weren't hurt. They walked off to their homes. The train was left behind, next to the tracks. An enormous woman screamed from far below. "John, downstairs, now", the giant screamed. I sighed, and went downstairs. "What is it mom?", I asked. She looked scared. Mom never looked scared before. That made me scared. I asked again: "What is wrong, mom?". This time mom answered, in panic. She said she didn't know. She hid with me under the table. I didn't know what was going on. I asked mom if we were playing hide and seek. She answered that it was something like that. Then the ground started shaking again. This time it was heavier than the previous time. The roof started to fall. I screamed. Mom also screamed. Then, it got silent again. We walked out of the house, looking for a safe place to stay. Our neighbor's house was gone. It was one big mess. Suddenly, something strange started to happen. The street next to Nick's house was falling. This sounds strange, but it was true. Nick's house disappeared. I started crying, because Nick is my friend. We played together a lot.

We walked in the towards the edge. We wanted to see what had happened. When we were there, we saw something strange. There was a hole in the ground. There were floating islands everywhere. Nicks house was on an island next to ours. I saw people in their garden. When I looked carefully, I could see Nick. I smiled, because he was safe. I asked mom if I could go to the swing set near our house. My mom sighed, but told me we could go there. First, she wanted to see if everybody was OK. We walked from

neighbor to neighbor. It seemed nobody was hurt.

The swings were broken. The earthquake broke the wooden beams. I was sad, because I really wanted to play. Mom said we should go home. I agreed, and we went home.

I don't have many other memories of the first period after the Event, since I was still very young. I remember being in school, and the lessons there.

The school was a small one. This was because there weren't that many children on our shard. We only had one class, with children of ages four to fourteen in it. After fourteen, children would start working. This wasn't the same as before the Event, but there simply was too much work that needed to be done, to keep children learning for longer.

Our education was partially practical, and partially theoretical. We were taught which plants were edible, and basics of farming, but also mathematics and history. History always intrigued me. Stories of the world before the Event made an impact on me. I spent hours wondering what happened, causing the Event. I had asked my teacher multiple times, but she had answered that this wasn't known. I promised myself that I would try to find this out. I wanted to at least know why the Entity was suddenly there, and if anyone know anything about this.

I was a bit of an outsider at school. I had friends and played with them, but quite often, I could be daydreaming instead of playing or studying. Questions could be stuck in my head for hours, without me finding an answer to them. The themes varied, from 'who is my dad?', to "if there's a god, why is the world like this?". I didn't have an answer to any of these questions. When I asked my mom, or my teacher, it became clear that they didn't have answers either.

As my school career progressed, it became clear that it would be a waste to let me work as a farmer, or as another simple job. My teacher asked me if I wanted to continue learning, and go to the capital. I told her that I had to think about it, and wanted more information. I was told that I could go to high school in the Capital, and decide after that what I would want to do. After some thought, I decided it would be a good idea to go. By the time I was permitted to go there, the cable car system had just been extended to a shard near our shard, and we could reach it using bridges. After a long and exhausting walk, we reached the cable car terminal. My mom wasn't permitted to join me there, because the capacity of the system was quite low, and because they thought it would be better for our education to separate us from our parents. I disliked this idea, but I did like that they were at least honest about it.

The school in the capital was different from the school on our shard, and also quite different from the schools as described in books from before the Event. The school expected a high amount of independence, expecting us to learn things without much oversight.

My main teacher was Maggie. She was my main teacher for quite some time, guiding me in what I should be learning, and helping where needed. Over time, we bonded, and started to share our stories.

She had been part of a group that was involved in debating if the Council in it's current form was a good idea. She explained how she had been misguided, and that she was happy to be given the chance to redeem herself. I asked her about her motivations to join such an organization, if the Council does this much to try and rebuild society. She answered that, at that point, she valued her personal freedom, and value highly, and didn't think it was reasonable that others decided on her place in society, with no hopes of her climbing up. I answered that I could understand that point of view, but also, that it was wrong, because our society currently doesn't have the resources for everyone to climb to their potential. I added that I was glad to have been given a chance to at least somewhat explore my potential.

We talked about my possibilities as a career. I explained that I wanted to research what lead up to the Event, and why it had happened. She told me that the research into that had been quite strictly closed-off, to prevent needless speculations. Besides that, it wasn't a high priority in general, because there were more pressing issues of the current time, compared to finding out why things had happened. As long as people were still starving, she said, there wasn't much need for knowledge on the past. She looked at me, and saw that I was starting to cry, because she had shattered my dream. She told me that my grades had been high though, so that she would see what she could do for me.

After some effort, I was let into the history team responsible for finding out what happened around the Event. I was told about the laboratory in Switzerland, that had exploded, starting it all. They told me however, that they didn't know who was working there, because all records of that had been lost. Also, most research done at this facility was kept at a need to know basis, to prevent press disasters.

My first task there was to compile a list of scientists that could have been involved in this experiment. I found two. Arthur Quincy seemed to be the only one that made sense to look into, since the other one had been absent from the scientific community for years leading up to the Event. It seemed he had vanished after the Event. He had either died, or made sure he wasn't found. So, it seemed he was a good candidate for a person who was responsible.

We reasoned that, if he was near the Event when it happened, he had had time to flee. If he was there, he must have known what had happened, and probably traveled to friends or family. Thus, I set off to find out who his friends and family were. I looked through old papers of his, trying to find information on what he was working on, and with whom. I found out that he didn't have many friends, and treated most of his colleagues as competitors. However, in one of his papers, he dedicates his research to his sister, Avril Quincy. That name turned up in our systems. She was an assistant at a bakery on one of the shards. I decided to head there, and talk to her. After an awfully long journey, I met her. She told me she hadn't heard of him since the Event. She could however confirm that he had been working on an experiment in Switzerland just before the Event. She also, to my bewilderment, said that he had been working together with Dennis She

said the two of them used to be rivals, but they had decided the research was too important to be slowed down just because of some childish feud between two scientists. Nobody had heard anything about the contents of the research, or about why or how these two had suddenly started to work together. She said that Dennis might be hiding somewhere. She had heard rumors that he was trying to send out messages, asking for rescue. However, there were no sources for these rumors, so there was also no way to trace where it could have come from. I thought he would also be interesting to talk to. Finding him could prove to be a challenge though.

Arthur however, was confirmed to be quite near the Event when hit happened, meaning he was probably caught in the radius of the blast. She wasn't sure, but there was still no confirmation of anyone alive from near that area. However, the amount of communications between shards on a continental level was still basically zero. Some messaging was achieved by sending unmanned, powered glider aircraft in directions where it was assumed that other shards must exist, but this was limited to a simple: 'hey, we are still alive, are you also still alive?', and some other messages of similar kind. Communications through that method wasn't really effective in any way.

I went back to the capital, feeling like a failure. Although I managed to find information that Arthur and Dennis might be involved in the Event, I found no evidence of where they are now, and neither did I find anything on where they were during the Event. When I re-entered the capital, and relayed this information to the rest of the team, they were obviously disappointed. They had had so much hope, and had really believed this would finally be our chance to figure out what had happened at the start of the Event, and why. Yes, we had figured out who had worked there around that point, which gave us some indication in what may have happened. However, we didn't know why they had done it, and we didn't know if they were still alive either. So, I decided to, for now, give up on this goal, and go back to normal work.

Violet and John

I remember the dreams of that night. The Entity had a message for me. The dream this time was simple. I was asked to be careful, to prevent making stupid mistakes. I wasn't sure what it meant with that, but didn't have time to ask questions before waking up. I marveled at the convenience it had with when I woke up, and wondered if it was a coincidence.

I ate breakfast, and got ready for work. As I was about to leave, the phone in my room rang. It was miss Walters, wishing me good luck. I thanked her, and went on my way. It seemed my route to work took forever, as well as being over in a mere second. I was prepared, but nevertheless, it felt strange to be talking to one of the worlds biggest criminals. I was told to keep open dialog, and give him the chance to speak openly. This surprised me, because he could very well be trying to convince people that he wasn't that bad. When I entered the studio, it was still empty. I sat down on my chair, and read through my notes. I rehearsed my first few questions. After that, I took a few minutes to relax. I felt a calm starting to surround me, as though I knew I would be able to do this. At this moment, someone entered the room, and asked me if I was ready. I took a deep breath, and said that I was.

I was surprised of him as he entered the room. He looked less like a horrible terrorist, and more like a philosophy major student. He kindly greeted me with a friendly hi. I stood up, and shook his hand, while I was feeling very conflicted about this situation. He introduced himself as William Fords, political activist. I thought that that was a weird way to say terrorist, but didn't say it. He answered the remark I didn't make by saying that he knew he was known as a terrorist, but that he never intended anything like this to happen, and still didn't understand how it could happen. I sighed, and said that it would perhaps be better to just start the interview.

We took our seats, and the camera started running. He seemed stressed, as I know I also was. We started simple, by introducing ourselves. I introduced myself simply as Violet Watts, he also only used his name.

I started by asking him why he started *the Voice of Reason*. He replied that he felt that the Council didn't listen to the voice of the people enough, instead only focusing on what they thought would be important. He explained that a lot of people are suffering outside the Capital, because of a lack of food, or other basic necessities. Therefore, he started a political group, which wanted to know the reasoning of the Council, and wanted to get involved in the decision making process. So, he said, we only wanted to have a voice, and be listened to.

I asked why they started to rebel then. He answered that the Council didn't offer them any way to react, only acting as though they listened, and never saying what was done with the feedback they were given. I thought for a moment, and asked him: "But, just putting it bluntly, why kill children?". He started crying. I waited for a moment, and continued: "Is it such a tough question?". He struggled to get himself together again, and

answered, with a small voice: “I never meant for this to happen, this wasn’t what we set out to do.”.

Meanwhile, William was also surprised at this situation, he had expected the interviewer to be a much more controlling or awful person. Violet, to him, seemed like a reasonable person. This confused him, because he had thought of Council members as being all evil. After all, they had killed off innocent people, just because they were his friends.

I continued with another question: “That’s a cheap thing to say; after all, you’re responsible for the organization you started. You taught people to hate the established government. Just because some people took it a step further than you expected doesn’t mean you lose responsibility, right?” William seemed to lose his nerve, and answered: “You seem very quick to judge a person by acts that were committed in his name. Our organization has always made it clear internally that we didn’t want to hurt anyone. We actively worked on finding out who had aggressive tendencies, and even reported some potential threats to the police. We’re, to this day, unsure who committed the terrorist attack, and we didn’t find anyone within our organization who knew him. For all intents and purposes, he didn’t exist.”. I was confused by his words. After all, it had been all over the news that the cell had been in close contact with the leadership of *the Voice*. I didn’t understand why he was lying so blatantly. He was a good liar though, he almost managed to convince me. I asked him why he was lying to me. He looked at me as though he didn’t understand me. I elaborated: “Don’t act surprised. You’re telling me you never knew these people, but it has been all over the news that the terrorist was known by the leadership of *the Voice*. So, you’re telling me that you really didn’t know of this?” He went silent and scratched his head. It seemed I had caught him. I let him think for another minute though, because I wanted him to come up with a reaction of his own. He sighed, and finally replied by stating that either means that he’s bad at judging character, or that the news here doesn’t always tell the truth. He asked me if I had heard of the killings on his home shard. I said I had heard of the group of criminals that got convicted there, but asked why it was relevant.

He sighed. He asked if I really didn’t know what had happened there. I replied that I didn’t follow him at all.

The conversation seemed to go nowhere after that. Shortly after, the broadcast ended, because we ran out of our time slot. After the recordings, we kept talking. I wanted to know more about this person, because I felt like he didn’t have the personality that would fit the crimes he had committed. But, it seemed I hit a wall, and that he didn’t want to admit what he had done wrong.

It seemed Violet just didn’t want to understand. I still don’t get it, the evidence was all there, but it’s as though she just didn’t want to see it. However, in a strange way, it seemed we were starting to come to some understanding. It seemed as though at least we understood why the other thought the way the other did, even though we didn’t even

come to agreement on the facts on which the thoughts were based.

We had our second television broadcast a week later. I wasn't too hopeful, because she didn't really give me much space to talk freely the previous time, instead only focusing on the crime that killed our organization. As I entered the room, she was already there. She asked me what I thought about the previous time, and if I would want things to change to the format. I thought for a moment, and told her I would like to talk more about the world in general, and less about the acts of terror that had occurred. She hesitated for a moment, and said she would see what she could do to change the balance between these two things a bit, but that the terror couldn't be put under the rug. After that, we started the second interview. She opened by asking me what it was that motivated us to rebel against the Council, even though the Council was doing good work. I replied: "the Council is indeed doing a lot of good work, and should be congratulated for that. However, freedom should never be something that's exchanged for convenience, or for help. If people aren't free to go where they please, and do what they want, they aren't much more than slaves." She asked me how I would see that happen with work that nobody wants to do. I replied that the income for these jobs should then increase, until people want to do that work. She said that the current period is only a temporary one, and that we will reach that period after this. I told her that they might have wanted to tell people that, instead of keeping them under control using lies and threats. If the Council had actually showed a commitment to that, then *the Voice* would have never been started. She actually agreed to my point, saying that communications from the side of the Council had been bad. I continued, by saying that actually the main sentiment in *the Voice* was one of 'us against them', caused by a feeling of being treated as lower class citizens. I added that this sentiment was actually proved to be quite correct from my experience here; even the leader of a world wide terrorist organization gets a more comfortable accommodation than any person outside the capital. She looked at me for a moment, seemingly lost in thought. She really seemed to actually try and understand me. I said it saddened me that she and I had become enemies, because it seemed like we could have worked well together. She replied that she at least agreed on that point.

The next week, we talked about the terror attack again. She asked me if I had, at any point, thought some people would be more inclined towards violence than I was. I answered that there had been a person. But, I had fired him, after he became too much of a loose cannon. I reminded her of the graffiti that had occurred a few times, and then stopped as quickly as it started.

Over the next interviews, we talked about details of life on both sides, and we got to a point where we got into an understanding. We never agreed on the conclusions, but we could at least see each others point of view. However, it became clear that I would not apologize, and would not really change my opinion, so there was no choice but to

continue to the trial. Violet and I said our goodbyes, and I went to trial.

The trial was a done deal. They argued that, since they had multiple witnesses claiming the Voice was responsible for the terror attack, I was therefore responsible for it. They said that I all but apologized during the interviews by saying I regretted what had happened. They didn't make any mention of me saying this was never an intention of it, and made no mention of the fact that I had tried my best to keep it from becoming a violent organization. The trial continued for a few more days, and my fate seemed to have already been sealed. Just as I was about to go to bed on the night before my final day of trial, someone knocked on my door. It was Violet. She explained to me that she had found out something terrible. The entire television show had been a sham, and it had never been broad casted. It was just used as a way to trick me into saying things, and to make me feel as though I had a chance. The material would be cut into pieces, and used for propaganda. I sighed deeply, and then decided not to get angry. I told Violet that I really appreciated her telling me, but that it wouldn't change anything. She told me it changed everything to her, because it meant the Council was actually acting in bad faith, just as I had always said. I told her it didn't matter anymore, because my fate was sealed. She looked at me with disbelief, but must have seen in my eyes that I was serious. I gave her a hug, and offered her a drink. If this was going to be my last night on this world, then at least I wanted to spend it with someone who actually understood me somewhat. She said she would do one drink, but would have to go after that, because she didn't want to get into trouble. We sat down on my bed, and enjoyed a glass of wine. After the glass of wine, she asked me if there was anything she could do to help me. I thought for a moment, and answered: try to achieve what I failed to achieve, but don't make my mistakes. She promised she would try to do so, and left.

That night, I couldn't sleep. Thoughts were racing through my head. Did I make the right decision in my actions, or did I fuck up. So, the next day, I arrived at my final day of trial, tired. I made one last stand, saying all I ever wanted was open debate, and that the only crime I ever committed was being of too good faith. The judge replied by saying: if that's really your opinion, then there's no hope for you. He continued by saying there could never be a place for me in this world, so I should no longer be a part of it. He elaborated by saying I was sentenced to death, and the sentence would be executed before noon the same day. I thought it was amazing how much quicker a legal system can be if it doesn't burden itself with the rights of the people in it. I was then let out of the building, with two guards next to me. They decided that, instead of just letting me go directly to my own cell, I would first be paraded through the city, as a prized catch. I was booed on my entire walk from the courthouse to the cell block. After entering my cell, I started writing. I wanted to finish my journal, so I could pass that on to the people that came after me. I hoped it could become an inspiration to keep on going. I managed to finish most of it, and requested it to be sent to Violet, because she had been my only company here. I hope she will read this journal.

I indeed received his journal. I read through it all in an hour, in pure silence. I was silenced by the idea that we were going to punish someone for trying to spread a few ideas. I don't know if he was right about his organization not being responsible for the act of terror that had been committed in it's name, but I was sure that he never wanted it to happen. I shed a few tears as I finished reading it. I decided, frustrated by my inability to be of any help, to ensure his story would be spread. I would finish the last pages of his journal, thereby finishing his story. So, even though it hurt me a lot, I decided I would visit his execution.

An hour later, I entered the execution area. Executions of this magnitude were always public. It was already really crowded, but since I was press-related, I was permitted to head to the front. In a macabre way, it looked more like an open air concert, than like an execution. People seemed cheerful, and happy. Then, the main 'act' started. First, two judges came on stage. They reread the conviction. William had been convicted for high treason, which is a really vague crime these days. I really wanted this moment just to not happen. I just wanted to be able to turn back time, and tell people they were making a mistake. I wanted to give William another hug, and tell him everything would be all right. But.. I could do nothing at this point, except watch. Watch as a kind, intelligent, funny man was put to death, because his ideas didn't align with the opinions of those in power. After this, and a minute of silence, William entered the podium. He looked around. When he saw me, an empty smile appeared on his face. The execution method had been borrowed from the French. At least this meant that it was quick, and relatively painless. I went silent, looking at him as he kneeled down. I stayed silent as the knife was brought to it's up position. I stayed silent as his head rolled off, and the crowd started to cheer. After that, I left, in silence, and went home.

When I entered home, I started crying uncontrollably. I didn't really understand why, because I had never cared that much about William. Somehow, his death struck me as a major tragedy. I went to bed, and after a few hours, I fell asleep. During the night, I was visited by the Entity. It told me that what happened today was extraordinarily sad, but, in the grand scheme of things, it had had to happen. It was going to set things in motion that were needed on the grander scale. I got angry, and screamed out if we were all just pieces on a chessboard to it. To my surprise, it confirmed this, and said that every person in a position of leadership has to think like that, if he wants to stay in such a position.

Continuation

There is this weird thing in the Capital that everyone is entitled to a proper funeral. Even criminals are entitled to one, although these always focus mostly on what they did wrong, especially for those convicted to death. For William, they reserved a spot quite central in town, so people would remember that the Council does what it needs to do to protect its citizens.

The service itself was strange. Before the Event, funerals were about commemorating the dead, but this felt more like a gloating action from the Council. Speeches were held about the importance of good citizenship, and other similar subjects. I felt my stomach turn

inside out by some of these. I was tempted to speak on his behalf, but was paralyzed by a fear of being hurt myself. Also, William had requested me prior to not make the same mistakes he made. So, I stayed silent.

A day later, when most people had already forgotten about his death and funeral, I went to his grave, and laid flowers there. I sat down next to it, and closed my eyes, trying to silently give him the funeral service he wasn't given the day before. In silence, I spoke about his kindness, and his friendly smile. I silently continued about the patience he must have had, while trying to talk to me about what was going on in the Capital. I silently bowed my head, bidding him farewell, while at the same time apologizing for what the world had done to him.

As I finished writing the final pages of his Journal, I noticed a scribble on one of the last pages. It said simply: To reach the others, go to the Three Hearth Den, at the northern shard, and ask for George. Tell them you know where the coffee is stored, that should gain you the trust you need.

Using my credentials as a journalist, I traveled to the North Shard. It took me some effort to find the Three Hearth Den, because it wasn't promoted or anything. It looked like your typical shabby pub, with lots of broken items, and smelling like a combination of beer, piss, and an unidentifiable third component. I went to the barkeep. He asked me, with an air of distrust, what I was doing there. I said I was looking for George, but got interrupted by him saying: there is no George here, leave now. I took a breath, and said that I knew where the coffee is stored. He looked at me with bewilderment, and said: a friend of William is a friend of mine, join me for a drink after closing time, and then you can explain to me who you are. I returned after closing time, and told him what had happened to William. I left out no details, explaining how I had met him, and had been unable to help. The barkeep looked at me, and told me he was happy for my honesty. He told me he would talk to George, and Christopher tomorrow, asking them if they want to talk to me. In the meantime, he offered me to stay in one of the empty guest rooms. He joked that there were barely any rats in the building. Or at the very least, I hoped he was joking.

The guest room was barbaric, and the bed was uncomfortable. However, I was glad that I was offered this bed for free, also, because it showed a sign of trust from the barkeep's side. The next morning, I went down to the bar, and was greeted, with breakfast already waiting for me. In the room were two persons unknown to me. They looked at me as though they wanted to talk, so I walked to them. They introduced themselves as George and Christopher, and invited me to join their table to talk. I asked them if they minded me grabbing breakfast first. They seemed amused by my politeness, and smiled. I quickly grabbed some bread, and a cup of tea, and joined their table. They started by asking me why I had chosen to leave the Capital, and tell them what happened. I answered that it was the least I could do, and that I hoped it would help at least somewhat. I told them the

same story I told the barkeep the night before. They got quite emotional when I told them William had been executed.

They asked me if he had been given a proper funeral. I replied that he had a proper grave, but that the funeral he had been given hadn't been the most proper one. I told them I had revisited it, and held a private service in his honor. They were surprised by this, but it seemed they were quite happy about this, in a way. I could see tears in their eyes when I talked about it.

They told me they were happy about the fact that I got to them, and talked to them, and remarked that they were pleasantly surprised by my kindness, and balanced view of the things at play. We discussed the conversations William and I had had, and how it had changed my point of view. I also showed them his Journal. They read it, and afterward, agreed that I should be the one to keep it, because it was addressed at me. They told me that, however much I did here, my place was not with them, because I had been a part of the Council. This hurt me a bit, but I did agree with them; I'm fundamentally not a revolutionary, and prefer to change things in small steps, rather than revolutionize them. Therefore, we said goodbye a few days later. I returned to my own shard, and they stayed to organize a new revolutionary movement. They still needed to work out the new structure, now that William had gone.

Christopher

When Violet told me William had died, something in me burst. I didn't agree when William decided to give his life up for the cause, and this proved, in my opinion, that I had been correct. I thought it was silly, and wouldn't yield any results. But then again, Willem and I had almost never agreed on anything. It was as though he lacked the guts to actually act on his ideas. It seemed he knew what was going on, but didn't see that, nothing would ever change without action. Nothing can be free without sacrifice. My name is Christopher Tell, and this is the story of my fight for freedom.

From the beginning of the Voice, I have been one of the more important trustees. I was one of the first ten people to join, and joined around a month after the Voice was started. Back then we were still mostly a group of people talking about how the world should be. It always annoyed me how little people were willing / wanting to do to create the world they claimed they wanted so badly. I more than once mentioned to William that I didn't agree with the course of action we were taking. We had long conversations about it, but in the end, we disagreed, and, the Voice was his responsibility, so his opinion was the one that was taken.

When we started to become more active, I got my hopes up. We started to spread throughout the shards, meaning we now had the power to act. A strategic rebellion or strike could give us the opportunity to demand change. The thing with cable car transportation is: if the cable car people on one end go on strike, there's nothing you can do to get the system running again, it's simply stalled. I explained this strategy to William, but he seemed to be appalled by it. He explained that this would only hurt the normal civilians, and that the people in power could just sit through it, because they had stockpiled all they could need for quite some time. I disagreed, arguing that they wouldn't want the perception of their control being gone. He said that this would mean they would need to go out to war, or accept that they lost face, either by submitting, or by waiting it out. Either way, we would have made enemies of the general population, instead of friends.

I was mostly involved in organizing local events. I always thought we should have a more pro-active role, and not limit us to not using violence. If the Council is going to use it's power, then we should meet it. You can't fight intolerance with tolerance, that doesn't work. So, I tried to change policy. If the top didn't want to listen, I thought, then I needed to work around them.

The problem with freedom is that you need some of it to fight for it. Simple example: if you're in prison, you're not in a position to fight for getting more freedom. This means that limitations in freedom should always be acted upon. No exceptions.

At some point, I took the liberty of organizing a slightly more forward thinking event. Instead of just talking and spreading pamphlets, I got some people together, and we wrote a giant poem on the side of a government building, arguing the terrible fact of it's

existence. After this became known, I was not treated with respect.

You may wonder if I was responsible for the terrorist attack that happened, and was put on our blame. I wasn't, but I was glad that it happened. It meant that we finally had made an impact, and could move forward. I suggested to double down, and use this opportunity to strike. I argued that, since we already lost our moral high ground, we might as well play that game. William asked me if I was happy with the terrorist attack, because it had given me fuel for my fire. I replied that I thought it could bring opportunities. William looked at me in a really strange way. I think he may have thought I was somehow responsible for the terrorist attack.

From the terrorist attack on, it started to go downhill for *the Voice*. Since we weren't really defending ourselves, it seemed that we lost most of our strength. We lost a lot of members overnight, because the government now officially outlawed our organization, being a terrorist group. Besides that, the general population no longer loved us, and instead had decided to hate us. I told William that this meant that we had to defend ourselves, and show people that we were on their side. Although we agreed, he didn't want to take action, saying that by opting to use violence, we would lose our last bits of credibility. I told him that that ship had sailed. From this point on, William didn't fully trust me anymore. He didn't kick me out of the Voice. I don't think he would have the guts, nor the power to pull that off. Besides, I think he feared that the Voice could split in twain, which would surely destroy most of it. Instead, he just stripped me of most of my responsibilities. I was no longer one of the trustees, and no longer permitted to have a say in important matters. This infuriated me. I felt betrayed by my peers. I didn't act on this though, opting instead to await my chances.

When William decided to turn himself in, I was surprised. I thought he must have been suicidal, because there was no way for him to get out of there alive. I didn't have an option to change this though, so, however much I was swearing, nothing would change. I could only await the bad news.

I remember hearing of the death of William. It was spread throughout the news. The leader of the rebellion had been executed. But, worse than that, he had apologized publicly for the acts of the Voice, saying it had been a big mistake. There was evidence of this shown in every newspaper. The newspapers were all lyrical about it; the war on terror had been won, and the Council had, once again, showed that it was very capable of protecting and serving everyone.. William had left me and George as people responsible for the after-care of the Voice. Well, technically, he had left George in power, but George isn't able to run such an organization by himself, so I volunteered to assist him. He said that William would not have wanted that. I replied that William's actions had lead to a decimation of our organization, and his own death, so that, maybe, he just wasn't the greatest organizer. I quickly added that his ideas were still valid, and we should continue fighting for them, but not necessarily in the same way. George agreed to this. I always

thought that George was the kind of person who was quick to agree to someone once they reason for more than about half a minute. So, in a way, it was good that I took the opportunity to take power, because otherwise this would not have ended well. Someone else may have taken over that position, and run the Voice into the ground. This did put me back into a position of power.

We started on re-organizing the Voice. George and I both agreed immediately that we couldn't just do nothing. If we did nothing, we would have lost, and William's sacrifice would have been in vain. So, we set to plan a strike. We wanted the Council to feel that it wasn't all-powerful, and that we were a group they should keep into account. Our plan was to cut them off from the rest of the world, by cutting all transport with the Capital. Although this would not go without a hitch, the actual plan was rather simple: arrange that all Cable Car systems break down at the same time. These systems were seen by everyone as vital for the entirety of society. So, paradoxically, nobody even thought about defending them. Anyone attacking or damaging these systems must be out of their mind, was probably the reasoning. Besides, there are too many terminals, and defensive forces are scarce. We didn't want to destroy the systems, but merely disable them for a while. Destroying them would actually be tricky, since the helicopter fleet was mostly out of service, because fuel and spare parts had almost run out. So, any link permanently destroyed may have more serious consequences than anyone could ever want. It could, in the worst case, mean that people in some areas starve to death, because transport is no longer possible, meaning they are cut off from food supplies.

We found out that the system's engines were being kept up to date by the so-called power engineers. These people were responsible for fueling the engines that power the cable. By turning them off, one side no longer provides power, causing the engines at the other side to stall. This should, according to our calculations, not cause major damage, but should take a system out until it gets restarted at both sides. This could disconnect the Capital from the rest of the shards, giving us the required time to organize a proper revolt. We found the required engineers, and managed to convince them. This was surprisingly easy, because most engineers have a natural hatred towards being taken for granted. And what's a better way to show how important you are than to stop doing your job for a few days? They told us that if they removed the transformers from the electrical cabinet, there would be no way to turn it back on until they wanted to turn it back on. This seemed like a fine plan, and we all agreed to set it in motion. A few weeks later, it was doomsday. We timed it so all cable cars stopped working just before Christmas season. We sent out our demands as a note, attached to the last cars that made it to the Citadel. After that, we went silent. The Citadel had no way to talk back, and we had no way to talk to them. For a week, this silence continued. We could measure from the wires that they were trying to send smaller packages over the line, but were unable to. The lack of transformers hadn't just made the system not get power from our side. It also meant that, on our side, no carriages could be loaded. Most importantly, however, it put the

engines into emergency brake mode, meaning the cable was forcefully kept still. The people on the other end must have realized this, because they tried to use the maximum amount of force that could be used without breaking the cable. The engine however, didn't give an inch. Thus, we were able to hold our blockade for the time we wanted. After the week, we re-enabled one of the cables, and sent a small package over the line. It contained our first few demands. They were:

1. *A representative council that's chosen democratically.* This would ensure that everyone has a say (albeit indirectly) in the policy that's made.
2. *A solid bill of rights.* This would prevent the arbitrary actions of the Council
3. *A legal system that's based on known to be working concepts.* This would protect the less powerful people from the more powerful.
4. *A means for everyone to verify what the council is doing, and why.* This would give people the power to know who to vote for the next time, ensuring that people have an actual say in things that are happening.

After this, we waited. We got a message in return, asking us to stop the blockade. They did add to that statement that we should at least let medical packages come through. We agreed to that part, and shipped their requested list of medical things with a secondary shipment. After this, we waited again. One thing to realize is that, once one side adds a heavy payload, the other side will instantly notice. That side then has two options: either to let it come through, or to stop it mid-flight. This means that sending people over without the other side agreeing means risking that they suffocate mid-flight. This meant that, even though one of the systems was technically strong enough to support a quite extensive military regiment, sending it across may mean that they would never arrive. A few days later, a reply message arrived. It said they would consider it if we released the cable cars. They said however, that change like this would take time. Finally, it was added that none of the people involved in the strike would logically be permitted to be involved in writing the new bill of rights, since they voided their rights by acting against the people in the world. But, as long as they retreated from the political debate, there would not be any consequences. This sounded quite friendly, but we didn't want to act upon this, because this would mean we would lose our chance to change the world. And, having others write a bill of rights, without any activists there seemed like a guarantee of not having a quality document. So, we replied back that we would be fine with having only a single vote when writing, and them having majority vote, but that we, at the very least, would want to be permitted to be at the meetings. This seemed fair to us, because that would ensure that we would at least *know* if they decided to write a poor constitution. We had no answer to this message for quite a while. The message that returned in the end was: we disagree. It also said: we no longer rely on the cable car for transportation, but want to give you a final ultimatum. You have forty-eight hours to reply, otherwise we're at war.

We didn't know for sure if they were bluffing. We did know however that their military

strength by far outclassed ours. We had some weapons available to us, which we managed to scavenge from old storage facilities, but most weapons ended up at the Council. Therefore, we wouldn't be able to fight them one on one. After some debate, we decided to go into hiding, and not explicitly reply to their ultimatum. We wanted to, and needed to, see what they were capable of, in a military sense. For a few days, it seemed their threat had been hollow. However, we started to receive reports of unknown flying objects heading towards our shards.

Most of us didn't really need to hide, because our faces weren't known to the government. So, it mostly meant us having to give up our spots, while we figured out what the situation was. We vacated the cable car stations, and set up a basic defensive perimeter. As the flying objects got closer, we spotted that they looked like planes, gliding through the vacuum between the shards. It seemed three of these gliders were heading to our shard. The size was impossible to guess, because it wasn't possible to guess the distance from our shard. A few hours later, they had landed. Out of them came around 30 highly armed soldiers. They took up a prominent spot on the market place, and declared that we had twenty-four hours to give ourselves in, and that otherwise they would see everyone as accomplices, and arrest everyone on the spot. Our thoughts were: you're unable to do so, because you can't take them all with you. Also, we had the advantage of knowing the area, and knowing where to hide. We laid in ambush, and waited out the time. As they started searching, we used a back-way, and made a run for the vehicles. These were only defended with two soldiers. So, using some trickery, we got close to them, and then attacked them. They didn't expect to be attacked by a group of ten people, but the fight was still quite fierce. Ten poorly armed, untrained people are actually quite a fair match-up for two trained soldiers. So, actually, both sides were losers in this fight. The council lost two soldiers, and a glider, we lost four of our dear friends. There was no time to mourn yet however, because we had to get these gliders in the air. We decided to try and take off with all three of them. The rest of our ground team on this shard, around twenty more people, joined us, and, after some effort, we managed to take off with the three gliders.

We were quite lucky, we had three experienced pilots in our group, from before the Event. The gliders were actually in interface quite similar to regular airplanes, but had a twist in their design, namely a boost mode to enable them to accelerate quickly, and escape the atmosphere of a shard. After that, it would keep moving forward until it reached the next shard. Since the space between shards doesn't really have an atmosphere, the glider has no way to control its flight path after leaving the atmosphere. This meant that aiming them is extremely important. Missing your target could mean flying for a really long time, possibly forever. Another thing we didn't know yet, but would find out about later, was that in some areas the area wasn't vacuum, but instead had gigantic storms. This meant that these areas aren't safe to fly through, because your destination is unreliable. Our first mission was picking up the other groups, and seeing how we could reorganize to prevent being run over by the Council.

We arrived on one of the other striking shards about half an hour later. Landing took some trickery, but we managed in the end. Since gravity is secretly quite a bit lower in the higher atmospheres, compared to what earth used to be, the landing speed can be a lot lower than on the Old Earth. As we landed, we saw that the shard didn't have any gliders on it anymore. This probably meant that they decided to listen to the Council here, and actually turned themselves in. So, we continued to the third shard connected directly to the Capital. There, we found a struggle between our faction and soldiers of the Council. The Council-members retreated when they saw our planes were coming in, and weren't carrying friendly soldiers. We decided our priority was at regrouping and organizing, and not at direct attack. Therefore, we simply picked up our people, and two of the gliders that were still parked there. After that, we retreated to a lesser-known shard, and started to form a strategy. Our primary goal was to get into a position of power, and to use that to pressurize them into giving up their position of power. We no longer wanted change in the Council, instead, we wanted the council to be gone. We at down around the map of all the shards under Council control, and the links in between them. We noticed that the Capital depended on the water supply from a nearby Shard, which also seemed to be easy to take over, and control. We decided that we shouldn't spread too thin yet, and thus went to the water supply with our entire team. We didn't come across much of a struggle, and took over the water supply without major incident. We then halved the water flow, and waited for response. Response came a few days later, in the form of a ball that was dropped onto the shard we had taken control of. It contained a simple message: give up, or we will show no mercy. We laughed, and halved the water flow again. A week later, six gliders flew in our direction. We were prepared for this option, and decided to just leave. We rigged the water supply, so it would take them quite some time to repair it, and retreated to another shard. From there, we decided we would continue like this: find something that annoys the Capital, seize it, and sabotage it, slightly. This would start hurting the Capital quite a bit. After that, we would see what our next step would be. This strategy would ensure a minimal amount of deaths, while still ensuring that our message came across. This may seem to be going too far to quite a few people, but you should realize that all we want is to be represented in the decisions that are being made.

Our second target was one of the armament factories. This would be protected more severely, but it would give us access to high amounts of ammunition, and weaponry. It would also limit the arms available to the Council. We did some research, and found out that there was a secondary arms factory in a more remote corner of the connected worlds. It was connected through one shard next to it, which was almost exclusively used as a transport hub. After taking over the shard next to it, we would either wait it out, or attack it from the air. The most fun part of it would be that we would be supplied with weaponry while waiting there, because the factory would assume that everything was still fine, and continue producing. We would simply not send through the produce, and send a message through the network that there was a small production hick up, but it

would continue in a few days. We would use that window to prepare an attack, and then take over the factory. So, we packed our belongings, and took off towards our new temporary home. We arrived there without major incident, and took over the cable car facilities. After this, we waited. By observing the shipment statements, we could see that every other day, armaments would arrive.

After this mission, we wanted to obtain more fuel. So far, we had scrambled on the limited fuel that was on-board the gliders, but that was starting to run out. So, we decided on making the fuel factory our next stop. From documents in the gliders, we figured out there were two places in our world which had fuel, both of which quite near the Capital, both of which properly defended. However, at this point, we were properly armed, so it shouldn't be much of an issue. We departed there a few days later, after having sent the factory a message that their production should be halved, to spare resources. This should lower the arms production for quite a while.

We arrived on the shard of the fuel production plant. We had decided to land on an unused patch of this shard, to prevent being under fire directly. We spread out and took cover, expecting to be attacked almost immediately. To our surprise, nothing happened. It seemed they didn't want to run into a trap, and had decided that it was our initiative. However, as we planned to take action, and attack, we heard an explosion. The factory had caught fire. We quickly moved in, trying to prevent the entire factory from burning down. We desperately needed this fuel to keep running our gliders. We ran into the factory, not thinking about strategy. This turned out to be an ambush. From three different directions, we were attacked. By some miracle, only three people were hurt significantly during this ambush, and we managed to continue to cover. We hid there for a moment, planning our next steps. We decided to split into two teams. One of our teams would press on to the storage areas, and try to salvage glider fuel there. Meanwhile, the other team would first figure out where the gliders should be put to be refueled, and then send the Gliders there. I would join the Glider-team, because that team was most mission-critical. We nodded, and went our separate ways. We walked to the output area of the base. We didn't meet much in the way of protest. We found one guard, but we managed to even take him out without killing him, or making significant noise. A few minutes later we found the loading area. It was vacated entirely, but seemed to still be operational. So, we decided to send a few men back to get the Gliders, and have the rest stay put to defend the position. The gliders landed a few minutes later. We tried to get the fuel running, but nothing came out yet. We slowly started to panic, because our gliders would only have fuel for one more flight, after which they would be done for. We then saw a huge explosion at the storage area of the plant. Fire gulfed there, and huge clouds of smoke came from that direction. We started to feel the heat stream past us. We heard screaming, and then we only heard the sound of a fire raging. We waited for a few moments, struck by the disaster that had just occurred, and then went to the Gliders. Two of them still contained enough fuel to fly. We debated for a moment, and decided that we

would leave with one of them, towards the Capital. The second one we would keep for the others, if they were still alive. We waited for about an hour more, before taking off. Nobody came from the fire, and it seemed to only get bigger. The fire started to heat up the glider, meaning we started to take a risk by keeping waiting. So, with heavy heads, we decided to leave, pretty much giving up on six of our friends. We had already decided that, since we wouldn't be able to refuel, we would fly towards the capital. We would make our last stand there. We had already found a map of the Capital in our glider, so we knew where to land, and which route to take to be able to capture a strategic point. We were going to capture the broadcasting center, and send out a broadcast throughout the Capital. We would take hostages, ensuring our continued stay there. During the flight though, we mostly were silent, commemorating the friends we had lost on our disastrous mission. We closed our eyes, and thought back on them in silence. They had given up their lives for our cause. We knew that we were probably going to do the same, but hoped it would at least mean some change. It was a quite hopeless task, but we wanted to try it anyway. We all thought there was no point in giving up now, because that would mean having lost everything anyway.

As we got nearer to the capital, we started to prepare our arrival. There were two locations suitable for vehicles such as ours on the capital. The one nearest to the broadcasting center would leave us with an open area to walk through, the other one would permit us to take a longer, but comparatively more well-protected route. We guessed the Council would see our arrival coming, but wouldn't guess our goal here. We loaded our weapons, and decided on our landing curve, and who would exit first. We figured we would be instantly spotted as being terrorists, so there would be little point in trying to hide ourselves. We wouldn't be recognized as being known pilots anyway, and wouldn't have the correct paperworks. Also, our vehicle's vehicle tag would probably be known to every staff member at the air strip. We had no other option other than the strips though, because these were the only two spots on the Capital with a long enough area to support the landing of vehicles. Since we were landing on the one used more for cargo than for passengers, we guessed we would meet less of a welcoming committee, but we still expected some resistance there. Just before landing, we thought of an alternate strategy, namely, to simply steal a glider there, and leave again. That would probably leave us with more fuel than we currently had. However, when we got near the airfield, we saw it had no gliders stored there. They were probably purposely removed from the air strip, to prevent us from being able to steal them. As we started our final approach, our fuel tank emptied. This caused our plane to go into a final dive flight, and do something that was the average of crashing and landing. We were not immediately greeted by an attack. From our windscreen we saw that we accidentally landed in quite a strategic spot. Our exit doors were already quite protected, because we had slid underneath an overhanging hangar structure. Basically, the airstrip was an old straight section of roadway somewhere on one of the larger shards. Due to the way it had moved, at the end of it was a partially collapsed building. The front part of this building was supported by pillars, rather than built under the ground. This had allowed people to walk

under it, and had allowed us to slide partially underneath that part of the building, with our door towards the actual wall. This gave us an amazing military advantage, meaning we could instantly get into cover. We exited our vehicle, and entered the building to gain cover, and a vantage point. We walked through the building, and figured out we had gotten extremely lucky. One of the members of our group immediately recognised the building. It had had a stop on a strange underground mail railway. Whereas most underground tunnels had been boarded up after the Event, this one might have been forgotten, because it was used solely for mail. So, we looked for the entrance to it. It took some time, because it wasn't on any of the signs. The railway nerd said this made sense, because it had been taken out of service decades ago. The railway itself had become part of the museum collection of a transport museum, and kind of been kept in repair, apparently. But, it hadn't been visible to the public yet, because this part of the exhibition was not available for public display yet, due to dwindling funds, and them being unable to get it certified for modern standards. So, it had already been forgotten about before the Event. So, whereas most subway tunnels, and other underground systems had been taken back into service as either storage or transportation facilities, this tunnel system was left entirely empty. The tunnel was dark, and somewhat moist, but otherwise not an extremely unpleasant place to be. We used our electric lights, and navigated our way to the platforms. The station looked like a tiny subway station. The track was around half a meter wide, and reminded us of the type of trains you would find at amusement parks. It had a quite a wide platform, with cargo trolleys standing ready to be loaded, even though they would never be used again. We looked around for some time, and, amazingly, we found a switch. After we flipped it, the turned power back on. Our railway nerd, as we jokingly call him, amazed us one further time as he showed us the old computer system that had been running it. Since it was stored this far underground, and quite ancient, the electromagnetic pulse caused by the event hadn't damaged the computer enough to take it out of service. Apparently, it worked purely based on relays, and not really based on a full computer. The system had already been ancient decades before the Event. Some lights weren't working, but other than that, it seemed fine. After some flipping of switches, we heard movement in the tunnels, and, soon after, we saw a train arrive, fully automatically. This amazed us, because that vehicle had been standing still for at least a decade. We were explained that the system was actually one of the first fully automatic railways, with mail-transporting trains moving through the center of the city. Naturally, it would now no longer be able to function fully, because the network was built as a loop, but the track layout was no longer complete. The system also was made to stop at every station, with a human pressing a button to let the train go. This meant that someone had to enter and leave at every station. Due to the way the relay system of the tracks were designed, it would stop one station before the end of the tunnel, or so the 'railway nerd' told us. It would not be able to verify that the route to the next station was available, so it would signal the train to stop. Therefore, we could safely travel with it for as far as we could.

The broadcasting center was actually two stops away, next to the old transport museum.

The Event had put museums on a lower priority, and that building had been put into use as a school, plus research facility. We arrived at the station underneath the former museum. The signage still said Central Post Office, reminding us of it's past as a postal railway. We left the train, and started looking for an exit. We found an elevator leading up to ground level, but that one did not have power. The signs towards the normal exits seemed to lead nowhere, so we decided to follow emergency exit signs. These, again, lead us towards a gated-off hallway. We pushed the gate, and, although it was locked, it seemed the lock had seen better times. We applied some force to the lock, and it broke open. We continued our way, until we found a connecting hallway, with multiple options to go on. One option was a staircase leading up, with no signs, one seemed to almost directly lead out. We reasoned that leading out would get us caught almost instantly, especially since we had unconcealed weapons with us. Therefore, we took the route that stayed within the building. It seemed these hallways were part of an alternate entrance to the underground station, and therefore hadn't been in use for decades. Just before we entered the regular part of the building, we found a map. We would enter the building on the third floor, just next to the main office area. From there, we would only need to move up two staircases to get to the broadcasting area. Also, since security was already on ground floor, we didn't expect much in the way of a struggle. We walked up the staircases, not finding any struggle. Some people noticed us, but they were too afraid to warn anyone. Therefore, we reached the third floor, and broke into the broadcasting studio. We were greeted by screaming people. We told them to relax, but they didn't really react for quite a while. A secretary picked up a phone to call for help, but put down the phone when I told her to so so. After that, we told people to sit down in one corner of the open area in the center of this floor. We then called the rest of the building, telling them we had taken the people on the third floor hostage for now, and that no reactions were expected to that. We told them explicitly to keep the television lines open, and that we would know if they were cheating that. The latter part was bluff for now, but we didn't want to lose our connectivity to the outside. After that, we broke into the television studio of the news program, and set to work to start a broadcast. We told the staff there that they had to cooperate with us, because we had taken hostages, but that nothing would happen if they cooperated. They looked frightened, but agreed to go to work. We asked them to set it up so the news-set would be broad casted live on all channels. This would ensure that everyone was seeing our message. About fifteen minutes later, the broadcast was ready. We took that time to discuss what we actually wanted to broadcast precisely. We had talked about this before, but hadn't reached an agreement yet. In the end, we agreed to focus on what we wanted, and why we wanted it. We immediately agreed that I should be the one giving the speech. I started by greeting the people in the Capital, and telling them everything would be all right. I said we didn't want to hurt anyone, and, if we were given what we want, then we wouldn't do so either. We continued by saying that we wanted the Council to become a democratic body. We were done with hollow messages, and wanted to see actual progress on civil rights. We wanted to have ensured that people would have a say in what happened in this world. I said we

no longer wanted to be ruled by leaders which weren't chosen, and couldn't be replaced if they misbehaved. Instead, a leadership should be based on them being wanted by the public. So, we suggested to share power between the Council, and our group, until elections were held. From that point on, a new Council would be formed, from the people voted into power. These people would actually design the laws and systems required for a functioning democracy. We ended our message with a request for contact from the Council. We invited them to clear the second floor, and to use that as a zone for communications. Besides that, we used the television broadcast to tell them that the people on the higher floors would be permitted to leave, but that, after that, we wouldn't allow anyone else to enter or leave these floors. We wanted the building from the third floor up to be ours. This demand seemed to have been met without protest, and we had our building to our own.

It seemed we were getting our way. We were getting food, and a meet-up was arranged between government officials, and a delegation from our side. We started by discussing practical issues. The government officials agreed to send food up every day, to ensure the situation wouldn't get worse. They would put the food on the second floor, where we were to pick it up after they left. After establishing that, we talked about the future. They were willing to give their word that they wouldn't try to remove us from our position, if we were willing to cooperate and work towards a solution. We told them that we mostly wanted to ensure the world would start being shaped towards a world in which people are equal and free. They replied that they understood our opinion, and would want to discuss the future in a later stage. However, they did say that, in principle, the Council hates to cooperate with terrorists and other criminals. So, we started on a negative because of the hostage situation. I replied that we weren't listened to when we didn't act, so we wanted to try more extreme options. They replied by saying this was not the subject of the current conversation, and therefore shouldn't be discussed now. For now, they mostly wanted to talk about how we were going to resolve the hostage situation. They wanted the situation to be resolved as quickly as reasonably possible, preferably without violence. We asked them how we would then ensure our safety, without having hostages. They replied that that was indeed the main problem we should try to solve today. We thought for hours about different ways to ensure our safety, with the release of the hostages, but in the end, came up empty. There was simply no way to prevent a raid of the building once the hostages were let go of. We ended the meeting not really having made progress on this point, but with a promise to get food a few hours later. When the food arrived, the ambiance on the third floor got more relaxed. It seemed that everyone had a feeling that everything would start to turn out all right. As we were all enjoying dinner however, we heard people walking on the staircases. We decided to take on defensive formations, with two people standing next to the hostages, to have a threat to whomever was walking there. We shouted down that they should head back, because people would get hurt, and it seemed they were listening, because they were walking down again.

Suddenly, from a hidden doorway, specialist troops walked in. They shot the two people next to the hostages before we could react in any way, and told us to surrender. We were armed however, and decided to open fire. The result was a bloodbath. When it became obvious that we wouldn't be able to win, a feeling of self preservation overtook me, and I ran away. I decided to try and find the tunnel which we had taken to break into the building. I would have nowhere to go, but at least I would not be here. I found the entrance back. I entered the tunnel, but the lighting seemed to have died. I was unable to find any light switches, so I had little choice then to walk through the dark. I found back the platform where we had left the mail train, and saw our train still standing there. I sat down on the edge of the platform, trying to regain my calm. There wasn't much to regain however, because it was clear that we had lost. Our entire mission had ended here, we had failed. Also, since my face had been shown on television, the chance of me being able to leave without anyone noticing was pretty much zero. I sat there for a while longer, contemplating my next step. Part of me wanted to give myself in, but another part of me wanted to just keep running until I got killed. Perhaps I would be able to find someone that deserved to be taken with me before my end. In the end, I decided it was probably best to try to get my message across to someone. I had started writing a diary, and wanted to get people to read it, and try to understand what we had been trying to achieve, and why. To this end, I would need to get it to someone who would read it. The only person I knew in the Capital was Violet, so I decided I would try to find her. I knew where she had been working, so I could try to return there in a few days. In the meantime, I figured, I should stay low, and prevent getting caught. Somehow the tunnels seemed to still be safe, but I was not sure how long it would take before the tunnels would be found out about, and searched. I decided that looking for a hiding space within the tunnels may still be a good idea, because, at the very least, it was not properly mapped, and had lots of spots to hide in. So, I decided to lay low for a while, and hide in the tunnels. I entered the tunnel back towards the station from which we had arrived. I had to lower my head, and walk half-crouching, because the tunnel was not made for people to walk in. The height of the tunnel can't have been more than a meter and a half. While walking through the tunnel, I took great care not to hit the third rail. The third rail was the power supply for the trains, and I did not want to find out if the trains had also lost power. The tunnel was dirty, and smelled of decay. The ground between the tracks was filled with some undefined black liquid. It looked like a hybrid of sewage water and machine oil. I managed to ignore it, and to continue walking through the tunnel. Every step I made echoed through the tunnel, each making me feel sure that it has to have been audible for everyone around me. After a few hundred meters, I saw a door at the left side of the tunnel tube. It seemed it had last been used at least thirty years ago, with rusted hinges, and the wood almost having rotten through. I checked the door, and miraculously, it opened without much effort. I pointed my flashlight around, trying to make sense of where I was. It seemed I had entered some sort of an underground storage area, but I wasn't sure what it had been used for. As I was looking around, I heard the noise of quite a few animals running off. They must have been frightened by my arrival. I walked into

the room, and closed the door behind me. Upon observing the room more closely, it seemed to have been someones basement. It contained quite an extensive wine collection, so the person can't have been poor. Upon observing the rest of the room, it seemed that the main entrance to the room had been blocked off, probably by a collapse. So, it was possible that I was the first person in here since the Event. After some observing, I saw that one of the corners contained tapestries. I made some sort of a bed out of them, and laid down. With some effort, I managed to relax. I fell asleep there, and was sleeping quite well. When I woke up, I noticed there was noise in the tunnel. I deduced that it must be a search party. I was quite hidden in my corner, plus, the door was still closed. So, I decided to just stay put, and wait it out. I could see the light of flashlights move underneath the door. The tension increased, causing my heartbeat to increase. The door was opened, and a flashlight aimed inside. A guard stepped inside, and scanned room. He decided it could have been a good hiding place, and walked around the room. I held my breath as he came closer and closer. He must have only been three meters away from me at his closest. However, he then decided the room was clear, and moved on. After he closed the door, I let a sigh of relief. I waited for a few more hours, until the guards had left the tunnel, and then carefully started to leave. From my watch, I could tell that it must be daytime by now. My plan was to finish my diary, and drop it off at the mailbox of the newspaper's office. I hadn't thought yet about what should happen after that, and didn't really care anymore. I didn't see any of the options having a good ending, so I stopped thinking about them. I spent the rest of the daytime completing my diary, which had also become some sort of a manifest.

I walked out during the middle of the night, and managed to put the manifest in the mailbox, without issues. I was amazed at how well people can be at ignoring others, especially during evenings. At least twenty people must have passed me by without noticing. There are advantages to people in cities ignoring the people around them. When I got back into hiding, I started to run out of things to do. I couldn't really wait here forever, and starvation didn't seem to be my kind of death. So, instead, I decided to do something traditionally stupid, and try to do one last symbolic act. I decided to try to blow up William's grave shrine, since it was built to symbolize the futility of revolt, and was designed to make people aware of the fact that we were their enemies. It was less of a gravestone, and more of a public reminder that disobedience was not tolerated here. I had done quite extensive research on making bombs, and we had stored some of the ingredients in the mail railway tunnel before we went to take hostages. So, I set to work to make a bomb. A few hours later, I had a bomb, and started planning my attack. I didn't manage to build a remote detonator, so I would need to get there personally. I didn't care anymore at this point, because it seemed my story was done anyway. I had already said my goodbyes to this world, so I no longer felt like staying for longer than I needed to. Plus, if I was going to go, then it would be with a bang, not with a whimper. So, the next night, just after midnight, I went on my way. It was cold outside, and I was wearing a long coat. This both obfuscated my face, and the bomb I was hiding under my clothes. I basically looked like a fat guy who was feeling cold. I left the tunnels near the bridge to

the shard with the central plaza. There were still quite a few guards walking around, but they weren't really paying attention. They must have been getting tired of having to check all the time, so, ironically, they missed the very reason for them to be on patrol. I crossed the bridge without any problems. At the other end of the bridge, I almost got into trouble. A woman said she recognized me, and called for guards. The road further ahead was more crowded, because a bar had just closed their doors. I blended in the crowd, and walked on. A minute later, I was on the central plaza. I walked up to William's grave, which had been named the *Monument for Security*. A tear went over my face, and I hesitated for a moment. I walked up the stairs leading to the gravestone. I read the inscription, and turned around. People on the plaza were looking at me, bewildered by me standing there in the middle of the night. I told them to walk away, because this would give quite a bang. I held down the trigger, and paused for a moment. Everyone around me seemed frozen. I shouted 'run', and people started to run away. I saw guards take aim, but before they could do anything, I decided I was the master of my own fate.

Violet 2

After relaying William's final story to the revolutionaries at the Voice, I decided to return to the Capital. When I returned, I was asked what I had been doing, leaving the Capital without an explicit task. I said that I had a lead there, but it turned out to be nothing. They wanted to ask more questions, but I answered that I had promised the lead to stay anonymous, and didn't want to break the trust I was given. So, I was let off the hook.

About a month after William's death, my dreams started to return. I wasn't sure what they meant this time, but felt like it wanted to teach me something. It seemed unable to explain what it was trying to tell me though. The dreams all went in the same way: first, I was walking on a plane of light, with a starry sky above me. Then, the ground disappeared, and I was floating through the stars. Finally, I fell through a strange hole in the sky, and ended on a small shard. After that, I woke up, every time. Just like the other dreams that were related to the Entity, I felt a strange truthfulness to this dream. My mind was, in a strange way, perfectly certain that this dream was real, in the same way you're sure that the book you're holding is real. So, naturally, I was very confused by these dreams. A few nights later, it was as though the dream suddenly got clearer. The dream still started in the same way, with me standing on a sort of plane of light. However, as the plane disappeared, I felt as though I suddenly had wings. I could fly around freely, not bound by gravity, or any other law of physics. As I flew around, I noticed the stars around me changing color. I then heard a voice, which I somehow already recognized. It told me that if I focused, I could change the world around me. So, I concentrated and was able to change the color of the sky around us to a dark blue tint. The Entity said I could do better, if I thought of bigger things. It told me I can already do a lot more than I think I can, but just need to trust myself to do so. I didn't know what to think of, so I decided to just think about the place where I had spent my last holiday. It took some effort, but after a while, I could feel the sand between my feet. Then, I could see the sea splash near me. I could feel the water stream over my feet, moving the sand underneath me. I turned around, and saw the rocky inland. There was a path going up the cliffs, towards a lighthouse. When I turned around again, I saw a strange man standing there. He wasn't there during my holidays, so I was surprised. He looked at me for a moment, and then walked towards me. He introduced himself as the Entity, but said he would prefer the name , because that sounds more like he's a living being, instead of a monster. He did a step to the right, and suddenly we were on the roof of a giant building. It had become nighttime. He told me that he wasn't from our universe, and that he had powers that weren't from this world. Simply put, from the perspective of our world, he could use magic. I looked bewildered at him, but continued listening. He continued, saying he saw in me a person with great potential, if I learned the right things. He told me that people can have an affinity for magic, just like he has. The breaking of the world-border did not only let him through, but also let some magic into our world. This brings risk, but also possibilities. I asked if this meant that I could perform magic, and if so, what kinds of magic. He told me that he was certain I could build an affinity for some types of magic,

but wasn't sure what types would work. Not everyone can do everything, and some types of magic are highly inadvisable to use. I asked him if he could teach me. He nodded, and with a movement of his hands, we changed locations again. This time, we were standing on the top of a hill. First things first, he said, it's important to realize that, even though we're in a dream, it still abides mostly by the rules of the real world. He threw a rock off of the hill, and you could see it fall in the same way you'd expect a rock to fall. He said that this made it a good place to train.

He told me the first thing to realize is that the magic comes from a type of energy that's around us. It has been there ever since the Event. It streams through the world, in the same way the storm always rotates. Any thing you're doing with magic is basically changing the flow of this Energy. The Energy can be used for a lot of things, such as looking for things on long distance, or giving someone far away advice. He told me that basically, most of the things books from the old Earth told people about magic was, in some way or another, possible. He said that I would probably be best at observing, since that fits the nature of my character best. This probably also explained me wanting to become a journalist. He told me to focus on something I wanted to find. I thought about my boyfriend, Charles. For a moment, nothing seemed to happen, which frightened me. The chance of him having died during, or after the event was actually quite big. ... told me to relax, and focus on finding him. If I didn't focus, I wouldn't find anything, he continued. So, I sighed, and regained my focus. I thought of him, his smile, his eyes, his hair, and could slowly see him stand before me. It was as though I slowly built up the scene of the place where he was. He was living in a farm, somewhere outside the reach of the cable car system. It seemed this shard wasn't mapped yet. When I looked around, I felt weird. I saw a woman stand near him, with a child next to her. I just knew the child was his, just like I knew the woman was his. I felt my stomach turn. ... must have seen what happened to me, because he broke off the scene. He told me this was the disadvantage of this skill. I could -sometimes- see a scene, but it can also be negative. Also, he warned me, not everything you're seeing is real. Sometimes you're seeing your own wishes, or fears. He told me he felt like the scene I just saw was probably real, but added, that it didn't really matter, because I wasn't destined to meet Charles again. I started crying, and stumbled out: how do you know all of this? The reply was, because I'm powerful to the point where I might as well be a god. I looked at him for a moment, and nodded. I mean, really, yes, he is a god. He broke apart the earth, and rebuilt it. His will is what made this world the way it is now. He then told me I had learned enough today, and should get some normal sleep before waking up. I nodded in agreement, and, with a movement of a hand, he changed the world into a sleeping room. I laid down on the bed, and fell asleep. No significant dreams were dreamed from there, and I woke up in the normal reality again. I woke up in confusion, and with a heavy headache. I drank a glass of water, followed by a cup of coffee, and my head seemed to calm down again.

I then went to work, still thinking of what I had seen the night before. My task for today was writing about the way the world had turned more peaceful, without the

revolutionaries fucking everything up. I thought, sarcastically, that this would probably change again soon. Christopher didn't seem like the kind of person to give up on his dreams. But, that's not something the people in the Capital had any interest in reading, so I wasn't writing about that. Instead, I wrote about how order had, once again, prevailed. I finished my work without interesting things happening, and went back home. As I entered home, I heard about the cable car strike. I was not surprised, because this seemed to be the kind of things they would go for. It wouldn't hurt people straight up, but it would make a statement. This night, I had a similar dream again, and was taught about how to observe energy. I didn't make a lot of progress this night, possibly because my head was elsewhere. So, after a few exercises, I was sent to bed. The next day, I entered office somewhat early, and was instantly asked to join an emergency meeting. We were tasked with creating coverage in a way that prevented major panic. We first thought of spinning it as a technical problem, but it soon became clear that the issues had already been leaked out among the regular population, so this was no longer an issue. Then, we were told to come to a secret location, because they wanted to show us something. It had been kept as a secret, to prevent revolutionaries from knowing beforehand about this, but the Council had secretly been working on new vehicles. We entered a hangar, and saw ten weirdly shaped planes. They looked like a weird hybrid of a transport plane and a rocket. The technology seemed quite primitive, and high tech at the same time. We were told by an engineer that it was built for cross-shard transport. It could take off and land almost vertically, and fly in the atmosphere of a shard. We were explained the technical features of the planes. After being toured around the facility, we were told that this would be the trump card in the battle against the revolt. The revolting people were thinking they were safe, since there was no real transport possible anymore, but, they didn't know of these vehicles yet. My mind was with Christopher, and his starting revolt. I wondered if they would have a chance against the specialist forces that would man these gliders. I was interrupted by one of the project leads, who asked what I thought of these new gliders. I thought for a moment, and answered that it was a clear sign that we were starting to move forward as a society. It showed that we were almost back on the same technical level that we were before the Event. He smiled, and said he agreed with me on that, and was really happy about the results the glider project had yielded. I asked him why there were no weapon systems on the outside of the gliders. He answered that they didn't want it to have a too oppressive appearance. The vehicles were, in principle, designed as multi-purpose vehicles. Their first usage would be of paramilitary kind, but after that they could also have use for emergency transportations, VIP transit, and other, important tasks that had no military benefit. Besides, he continued, shards are tiny to the point where they have very few options for military use of external armaments. The only real way to engage in a military way is by landing, followed by ground combat. But, he added, this was not the main purpose of these vehicles.

After the presentation of the new gliders, I went back to the office, and wrote my article. I handed it in a few hours later, and decided to go home. That night, I dreamt again.

Within a few seconds, I managed to think of a landscape, and met Eric again. We practiced walking around through my own past. Then, he told me that, actually, there's nothing keeping me to my own past, but I could also walk around through the world around me, at a certain moment in time. So, if I remembered what I was doing during the event, I could travel around in the world from that time. I would still need to be wary of the fact that time still moves forward, but transit can, in theory, be instant, as long as you're able to think of the place where you want to go. I thought about the day of the event. I saw myself sit in my chair, watching the news. I saw myself pick up the phone, and talk to Mary. I saw myself pet my own cat. I tried to pet the cat, but it didn't reply. I figured that I was merely an observer, and not a being within the world I was seeing around me. I tried to open the door, but couldn't. Eric had appeared next to me, and said that I should instead imagine the hallway. I did so, and suddenly I was walking there. I walked through the hallway, and noticed it was really quiet in the building for the time of day. I guessed most people must have been watching television at this point. I stood still for a moment, bewildered by the amazing power I suddenly seemed to have got. I didn't really know how to control it yet, but it seemed I was suddenly able to observe events that had happened in the past. I decided to continue walking. I thought of where I wanted to go next. I decided to look at my boyfriend (I guess by now ex-boyfriends) work. I closed my eyes, and concentrated for a moment. I suddenly heard him teaching children. When I opened my eyes, I saw a classroom full of kids. They must have not been aware of the Event having occurred yet, because they were still busy working on math exercises. I looked at Charles, who seemed to happily enjoy doing his job. For a moment I forgot about all the things that happened since that moment, and felt in a way I hadn't felt before. I wanted to hug him, and moved towards him. As I got close to him, I saw the scene fade away. I was back in my own room, and Eric was standing in front of me. He explained that I should not grow attached to the past, because that will make reality harder to bear. I nodded in confirmation, hurt by the reality I was put back into. He told me that he thought it would be best to keep the lessons at this for now, and to continue on a later point. I agreed, although I felt sad for not being able to see more of the past, but could see the risks to removing myself from the world for too long.

The days after this, I was occupied with the revolt that was going on. The gliders had been sent away, but only three of them had returned a few days later. This called for investigation, which was started a few days after. However, it seemed the Council was permanently one move behind, because by the time this had happened, the water supply was taken over by the Revolt. They seemed to be mostly concerned with annoying us, and not actually doing damage. This struck me as at least somewhat noble, although their strategy had shifted significantly after William's death. This made me wonder if his execution had been a good idea. I sighed, and tried to think of other things, because the thought of William's execution was already extremely sad without the thought of it being useless added to it.

The blocking off of the water supply did not immediately affect life in the Capital much. After a day, the Council started to set rations to water, and limited the flow of water to

houses. The water storage of the Capital would be enough for about a week, I heard from reliable sources. I was tasked with writing articles on how to save water, and articles aimed at saving public morale. In the streets you could see people getting more worried by the day. It seemed the sense that the Council was capable of protecting everyone was dwindling by the hour. Most of the entertainment-based parts of society grinded to a halt, because people no longer felt motivated to do them. Even though all that had happened was a limit to the water supply, it felt as though our very existence was put at risk. Meanwhile, I mostly felt a strange sense of excitement. I wasn't scared for the future, because I had seen the leaders of the Revolt, and knew they weren't trying to hurt people, so I could just observe the show down of two powers. A few days later, observers found out that the water supply was vacated, just before a military intervention was due. The gliders the revolutionaries had captured had flown away behind a cloud, destination unknown. The information on where they were going would probably take days to arrive by cable car. Gliders had not yet been spread around the world, and no real mass communications systems existed yet. So, the revolutionaries were gone without a trace, and it would take a week for their position to become known again. In that time, they could just haze the Council, showing people the limits of the power of the Council.

As the revolt went back to the background, I started to relax again. Even though we all knew they would strike again soon, life got back to sort of normal. I was able to focus again during a dream. I decided to focus on the day the Earth broke apart into pieces. I managed to see myself at the spot I was at that moment. Eric told me that I should know that I'm not in any way bound by my real self. Just because I, so far, had only stood on the ground didn't mean that I necessarily was bound by gravity. He told me to try to fly, by focusing on being light, and going up. I tried to do so, but nothing happened. He told me to think that I was an object in water, bubbling back to the surface. I tried to do so, and focused deeply on this. To my own amazement, I left the ground. I could suddenly hover in the air, in a totally strange way. Sure, I've dreamt of being able to fly before, but this was different, since it was me who was controlling my flight. I enjoyed the moment for a bit, and then flew to a nearby shard. I saw people sitting next to a house that had burned down. Their shard was tiny, and seemed to have no resources at all. I thought: these people have no chance of survival, whatsoever. I got really down for a moment, thinking of the fact that these people had already died, and probably of starvation. I decided to move on, and fly along. I saw lots of people stuck on small shards, but also quite a few bigger shards that seemed to actually have a chance of survival. I then thought it would be a good moment to see how my cat was doing. So, I flew in the direction where London had been. The sun was still somewhat visible, so I could derive the direction of north. Eric interrupted me, saying there's no need to fly at this kind of a low speed. Instead, I could go a lot faster, just by thinking of going faster. I didn't really understand what he meant. He tried a second time, saying, basically, it's as though you think you're in a tunnel, and the lights are passing at an increasing rate. It's all about finding the metaphore that allows you to understand the world, and therefore manipulate

it. I thought about that for a moment, and then focused on the concept of lights flashing by. I could feel myself increase velocity as I increased the frequency at which the lights passed by. In no-time I was seeing shards that looked more like the suburbs of London. I flew towards the outer rim, where my home would have been. It was quite tricky to figure out where I precisely was, because shards had shifted in vertical as well as horizontal positions. After some time, I found a shard which I recognised as being only a few streets away from my home. Therefore, I started to look at the shards around it. As I did this, I could, move around at an increasingly precise way. I no longer was limited by needing to move around, instead, as I started to want to be somewhere, I suddenly was there. I didn't know how I learned to do this, but I suddenly was able to do so. After looking at around fifteen different shards, I found my own flat. Here the Entity interrupted me, saying: if you get near a place which you already know, you have to take special care. You might enter the world you want to have existed, instead of the world that actually existed. I thought about that for a moment, and then replied: how do I take care of this? He replied that I would mostly have to move slowly, and try not to get too emotionally invested in the things I might find. I replied that I understood. I took a deep breath, and moved slowly towards my apartment building. Most of the windows of the building had gone, but the building itself seemed to be mostly intact. I looked at the front-door, and moved to the hallway behind it. There, I found out that most of the lights had broken, and the internal walls had cracks in them. However, other than that, it was still fine. Some of the rooms had a smell of fire in them, so there was quite extensive damage. It seemed that most of the contents of the building would probably not survive for much longer. Normally, sprinklers would take out the fire, but these relied on the water supply, and since this shard's water network was cut off from any water supplies, there was no way for that to happen. Besides that, there was no fire department that would be able to reach it. Hopefully though, it wouldn't totally perish in the fire. I sighed and took a moment to regain my calm, trying not to get too emotional over the thought of my home being utterly destroyed. Even though I hadn't lived there for over five years now, I still felt like it was my place most of all places I had ever lived in. I walked on, towards my own apartment. I reached it a bit later, and took a moment before entering. As I entered, I saw that it was quite a mess. Most of the objects in the room had been severely damaged, or destroyed. There was water everywhere, probably from the earthquakes before the Event broke apart the world. There was no fire though, so that was something. I was looking around for the cat, but didn't find him. I didn't find a dead cat either, which struck me as good news. So, I decided to look for clues on where it could have gone. I found some fur on one of the window stills; he had been shedding a lot lately. I exited the window through the same window, and saw that it had probably followed a water pipe on the outside of the building. I flew next to it, looking carefully for evidence of a cat having walked there. I found a few cat hairs on a point where the water pipe crossed an emergency staircase. I guessed the cat may have taken the staircase down to street level, and followed that route. Down the staircase, I found a few people, sitting next to the building. They were my neighbors, who had always been nice people,

although they had a weird hobby of making lots of strange noises during the night. I don't mean bed-related, but actually strange noises, like, the kind of noises you would hear in a 70s horror movie. I observed them for a moment. They seemed to be in shock of the event. This took me a moment to realize, but it finally dawned on me that, to them, the Event had only just happened. I lived five years after it, but to them, this had happened only about an hour ago. They had been watching stupid soap series on television, and suddenly, their world had broken into pieces. I felt very emotional all of a sudden. I felt sad for them, because they had just lost their everything. Ah well, at least they would stand a high chance of survival, because there was still a supermarket with quite high stocks on this shard, and, since most people were at work at this time, they wouldn't have to share their supplies with a lot of people. This gave me at least some feeling of relief for them. I stood there for another moment, and then continued looking for my cat. It may have seemed stupid to almost everyone in the world, but, to me, my cat was extremely important at that moment. I didn't care about it surviving, but I did want to know what had happened to it. I found more cat hairs on the path to a small nook near the building, in which the cat was hiding. It seemed scared, but otherwise fine. I wanted to pet it, but realized I couldn't, so I didn't attempt to do so. I felt a sadness coming up, almost overcoming me. I fought back, and managed to stay calm. I stood up, and walked around again. When I turned around a corner, I met the Entity. He told me I may want to learn how to exit this world myself. I confirmed this, and he said it's actually quite simple. The trick is to close your eyes, and think about your real-world position. This means it was vitally important for me to remember where I went to bed in the real world, to prevent getting lost here forever. Or, at least, until he would find me, and put me back in my own body, in my own world. I decided this would be a good moment to try this out, and closed my eyes. I thought of my room in the Capital, and my bed. After a few seconds, I woke up in my own room. Somehow, I did so exactly at the same time of my alarm clock. This struck me as odd, but I didn't think too much of it. Compared to the other things happening, waking up at a convenient time seemed to be unimportant.

For a few days, nothing seemed to happen. This made everyone in the capital wary, because there was no way the revolt had just ended there. After that, the revolt continued in strength. First, they had taken over arms factories. I started to feel like this could not continue on nicely. They started to become increasingly aggressive, meaning the Council would soon have no choice but to attack fiercely. I had a feeling something must have gone wrong, causing them to become more erratic, because suddenly they attacked, using only one plane. Even though it seemed they had crashed, and perished in the fire, they managed to somehow sneak into the Broadcasting building unscratched. I was working on the fourth floor when it happened, at the office of the newspaper. I remember the chaos starting out of nowhere. I was writing a stupid article, I don't really recall what it was about, when I suddenly heard screams from the floor below us. Other people started to panic, and observed what happened. I meanwhile stayed relaxed, thinking there was

no reason for alarm just yet. We soon figured out that the floor below us was put into a hostage situation. We decided to just stay put, and see what would happen after. We didn't want to push the hostage takers into doing anything stupid. One of the people on our floor took out playing cards, and lots of us just started to have fun. This relieved some of the stress of the situation. I however, decided to keep track of what was happening one floor below, to try and get an as complicated as possible report of the situation. As I finished everything I was able to gather from the floor above, I heard someone say that there was something important on the television. It was the hostage takers, who had taken over all television stations. We listened carefully to their demands, and were relieved when we were told that we would be let go soon. We were starting to get tired and hungry. When the hostage takers came to us to let us out however, something in me made me decide to be a hero. So, I asked them if they had people down there that should really leave, because they were not feeling well. I had wanted to ask if I could take over one of the places of the people there, but their reaction made me come back to my senses. I said, nevermind, I just had a strange thought. I continued that I was getting really tired of the long day. They shrugged, and we were let past the third floor. After that, it was just walking down staircases until we were outside. I felt really relieved, and wanted to go straight home. However, I was held up by my editor, who told me I was put on overtime duty, because someone had to keep reporting on the situation. I replied that nothing was going to change for at least six hours, but he didn't want to listen. He told me that people wanted to hear about it, even if nothing changed. So, I was sent to a makeshift office location, which had been set up to allow us to continue working. Luck had it that I had taken my handwritten notes on what had happened in the building with me, so I could easily start writing about the situation there. We decided that we were going to do an additional edition of the newspaper, which would be released in the evening. This edition would contain special information on the hostage situation, and would possibly already include some Council replies to the situation. I first wrote an article on the situation there, as I had experienced it. I decided to improve my story, by asking some of the other people that were in the building about how they had experienced it. This is how I ran into John.

John seemed like a strange kind of guy. I didn't know him, but somehow, he seemed like a nice guy to me. We talked about his experiences during the hostage situation. He didn't seem too bothered by it, stating that he was happy that he wasn't taken as a hostage, and felt for the people that were still stuck in the building. Long story short, his answer was the typical answer.

After talking to John and quickly finishing this part of my story, I was tasked with trying to get important people to speak their minds. This is typically a really ungrateful task, because it's rare for this to have any effects whatsoever. After talking with five of them, it became clear they all had the same message: they felt for the people taken as hostage, and hoped that it could be resolved without anyone getting hurt. They all condemned the crime. However, none of them wanted to talk about a response to it. After writing this into a short article, I went home. I arrived at around 3 AM, and went to bed straight

away.

It took me some time to fall asleep; I was stuck in thought. I thought about the hostage situation. Then, just as I was about to fall asleep, I thought about John. Something about that guy made me feel really weird, as though he was somehow extremely important. After falling asleep, I met with Eric, who told me that I had an important role to play in events to come, but that he couldn't tell me why. He did however tell me that it might be wise to look into John, and who he is. So, I tried to head to a moment in the past, where John was already working in the building. After some effort, I managed to find him while he was walking through a hallway. I followed him around, until he entered his office. When he entered his office, I saw him get back to his work. He was working on creating the financial plans for a research proposal for the design of a new type of transportation, allowing affordable fast transportation for people and goods. He was responsible for supplying proof that the idea was financially sound. However, this didn't feel like the sort of thing he would want to work on. I looked through the office, and found some papers hidden in one of the boxes. Somehow, I was able to read things even though they weren't lit. I couldn't see them, strictly, but could still read them. I found a document, where he stated that he wanted to look into Dennis de'Moire and Arthur ..., because they may have been involved in the start of the Event. There was a circle around Dennis's name, so I guess he was more important. He said that their locations had been unknown after the Event, and that their deaths were probable. I didn't recognise these names, but I did think it was really intriguing to see new information on the cause of the Event. I got enthusiastic, and wanted to continue working. Then I remembered that I should take care not to stay in this reality too long, and I decided therefore to leave this for now. I closed my eyes and focused. After some effort, I woke up.

I went back to the temporary location for my work. It was in a strange way, relaxed. We had reported on everything that had happened, and were now, in a way, waiting for something new to happen. This, however, is how news typically works. It isn't quiet when nothing is happening, it's quiet when there are no new stories to tell. At that moment, no story was important enough to tell, and the next newspaper wouldn't be due until tomorrow. We expected so much to change before then that there was no point in writing anything down yet. A few hours later, the news started to flow again. This time, it seemed the dam that had been holding the flow had collapsed in seconds. The Council had first held a meeting with the hostage takers. This was newsworthy in itself, but nothing really important had actually happened. The events that took place a few hours later were far more extreme. The Council had decided that it was time to end the hostage situation by force. They had broken into the building, and killed almost all hostage takers. Because of good planning and high skill level, none of the hostages was even hurt. We decided to use this as a situation to show off the skill level of the special guards. One of the hostage takers was still on the loose, and the guards were looking to find him. Finding him should be a matter of time though, because his face was well known. He didn't get caught however, and nothing important happened the rest of that day. After finishing up my articles, I therefore just went home.

After dinner, I immediately went to bed. I didn't feel like doing anything fun, instead I just wanted to dream, and try to find Dennis. I managed to dream up the building in which Dennis and Arthur had been doing their research. Normally, these kinds of buildings would be impossible to enter without a permit, but, nobody cares about ghosts. Therefore, I was able to enter in no time. I had figured out before that I could just follow my instincts to know which way to go, and somehow I would end up where I wanted to be. Therefore, after some walking around, I managed to find the room in which Dennis and Arthur were preparing their experiment. The setup looked frightening, with lots of blinking lights and complicated displays. I didn't understand in the slightest what was going on there, but I felt instinctively that this was the place where it was going to happen. The only question was how long it was going to take before the Event would start. The Entity also entered the room, and told me that I could skip through time by closing my eyes and thinking of the moment you want to go to. It's actually just like moving through space, but just a bit more strange, because humans aren't used to moving through time. I closed my eyes, and tried to move to the moment just before the experiment was started. It took me a bit of effort, but I managed to get there in the end. I saw Arthur and Dennis set up the experiment. The setup started buzzing and sparks flew around. It seemed to be working flawlessly though, and Arthur and Dennis were quite happy with the initial results.

As the sphere started to get out of control, Dennis ran away. He left the building in a hurry, and got a cab to get away from there. From there, he took a train west, into France. It seemed he had prepared for this eventuality. He went to a hotel some distance away, in France. He seemed to really want to get away from it as quickly as possible. I decided that the hotel would be a good spot to return to later, and woke up.

The next day, Christopher still hadn't been found. Halfway through the day though, someone came by with a package for me. It contained Christopher's journal. I quickly read through it, but found nothing new in there. I decided to keep it until an opportunity presented itself for all of this information to be combined. For now, I would just keep it stored safely, at home. After an uneventful day at work, I went home again, and started dreaming.

I was almost instantly back in the hotel where Dennis had gone to. I decided to skip forward a few weeks, because I guessed that Dennis would stay there for quite some time. I was correct in this guess, four weeks later, he was still there. By this time, the Sphere had grown immensely in proportions. It seemed Dennis got increasingly aware of the damage he had done, but wasn't able to stop it, or help with the fight against it. He was fully aware that the Entity outclassed anything on Earth. I skipped to the day before the fateful day. Dennis must have seen in the news that the Entity was getting attacked, because he decided to leave home. I followed him, as he first took a bus to a nearby nature area, and then climbed a small mountain. From the mountain, you could already see the Entity; it had grown that much. I could easily see that Dennis was getting quite

anxious by the thing he had set free here. He hadn't wanted this to happen. The attacks came, the same way I remembered, and then the ground started to move. First came the earthquakes. We weren't that bothered by them, probably because we were somehow too close, meaning the impact was less, somehow. Both me and Dennis were waiting for what would come next. Dennis fell to his knees as he saw what was starting to happen. He watched with disbelief as the Earth started to break into pieces. He collapsed onto the ground, only now realizing how much damage he had done. I could see that he was really not happy with what was going to happen. He must have thought this to be the end of the world. I switched my focus to watching the Entity. It seemed to have grown substantially over the last few minutes. It was now starting to move down, towards the core of the Earth, while the shards were moving away from the core. No matter how many times I saw this scene, it still seemed surreal to me. Sure, I was used to the world after the Event by now, but still, the transition of the world before the Event to the world after the Event was bizarre. Just after this moment, somehow, our shard didn't go up with the others. Instead, it started to move down. Somehow, the force that was moving the other things up wasn't affecting our shard. So, we moved towards the weird hybrid of the Entity and the core of the Earth. I expected this to be our end, but it wasn't. The shard continued moving down, moving into the storm below. Dennis seemed to have accepted his death, but faith seemed to have a different future set out for him. We moved into the storm without being hurt. It seemed our shard got some sort of a bubble around it, protecting Dennis from being killed by the storm around the shard. It continued moving down, until it reached the center of the storm, and stopped there. Once I figured this out, I decided it was time to leave this reality. I thought back on my own home, but I couldn't figure out how to get back anymore. I seemed to be stuck here, because I had stayed for so long that I didn't remember my real place in the world. I sat down, and thought. I thought back on what had happened since the Event. The memories seemed to be distant to me, stories almost. I thought back on the flat where I lived before the Event. I suddenly was in my flat. I could see myself sit there, with Meow and Charles there as well. As I walked around in my flat, it seemed to still be unreal. I gave it some time, trying to recall details of my life here. I remembered the fridge magnets on the fridge-door. They were souvenirs from holidays in Spain. After I stabilized this memory, I decided to move forward in time, towards the day of the Event. I saw myself drive on the road, on my way from nowhere in particular, back to home. I could see the ground start to tremble. I saw the farmhouse, that was catching fire. I remembered this fully now, and decided to move on. My trip to the Capital came back to me, and from there, I was able to find back my home. From there, I started to remember the history of what I had been doing after the Event. I finally started to remember where I had fallen asleep, and in what situation I had been. I remembered why I had gone here, and then, finally, I woke up. I decided it would be best to involve John into this, because he would probably really want to know this. Thus, I started to look for information on how to find him. It wasn't hard, since I already knew where he worked, so I quickly found his phone number.

John 2

It's me again, John. You may have already heard of the revolts that happened after the execution of William. These revolts left a chaos in the world, but there was still hope. It seemed the revolts were slowly slowing down, with the changes proposed by the Council being taken seriously by most of the revolting group. This gave us all a chance to pick up our work again.

Two weeks after the official disbanding of the revolt, a woman called me. Her name was Violet, and she told me she had something important to talk about. We agreed to meet in person, but, for practical reasons, we didn't do it in a proper public space, and instead, decided to talk in a nice secluded restaurant.

We both arrived within a minute of each other; both a few minutes early. She looked beautiful, although she must have been in her early forties. That means that she would be around 20 years older than I am. We greeted each other, and got shown our table. Our table was next to a window, overlooking a small plaza. We sat down, and started talking. She said that I must be wondering why she had chosen to contact me. She didn't wait for a reply, and continued, stating she had heard of my obsession with finding out what had caused the Event to happen. I replied that I indeed had been looking into that for quite some time, but had found a dead end. She told me she might have found something, but that her source of information is rather strange. I replied that I didn't care anymore at this point, because I had almost given up on ever finding more information anyway, so she wouldn't be able to disappoint either way. She said it would really be a strange story, but continued, saying she had information on where Dennis .. Was, or where he had been recently. I asked her where he was, and how she knew. She replied that he was stuck on a shard somewhere near the center of the world, but that she didn't want to say how she got the information. I told her I didn't care in the slightest of ways.

She said she would rather show me what she was able to do. She said she wasn't sure, but thought she could show me. We agreed to head to her flat, and got to talk. She told me that she had managed to get in touch with the Entity. I looked at her with disbelief. I asked her how she was able to do that. She explained that she could talk to it in dreams. I thought that was really strange, but was intrigued. I asked her to prove it. She told me the Entity had taught her a way to look into the past, and observe what was happening there. She told me that I had been researching who were responsible for the Event, and that I was stuck after finding out Dennis and Arthur were involved. She told me that she had found out where Dennis was hiding, but would not be able to get there, because it's a one-way trip. I asked her where he was. She replied that he was at the center of the Entity, stuck on a shard there. She told me that I might be able to visit it through dreams, but that I wouldn't be able to talk to Dennis that way. I asked her if we could try to go there together. She replied that that could perhaps be possible, but that she had never tried to let someone else follow her.

She told me to relax, and hold her hands. She closed her eyes, and I did the same. We sat

opposite each other, both with legs crossed. She told me to focus on her voice, and that she would guide me there. She told me to look for the light. I didn't really understand what she meant by that, but tried anyway. Suddenly, I started to see a tunnel, with light at the end. I tried to head to it, but lost focus for a moment. She said, in a stern voice that I should really focus, because otherwise it wouldn't work. I concentrated, and managed to regain my focus. I reached the light a few moments later, and saw Violet there. We were standing on a cloud. We weren't the only persons there, there was a third person there. He introduced himself as the Entity, and said he preferred to be called Eric. Eric explained to me that I was chosen as one of the people to be the bridge between him and humanity. I asked him how many people there were in this task. Eric replied that there were around thirty people that he had contact with, around the globe. He explained that it was vitally important for the stability of the human world that we knew what had happened there, but needed to figure it out for ourselves. If he just flat-out told us, we wouldn't be able to place it. The problem is, however, that the way there is one-way, so there's no way for us to currently get the message out. We decided to observe the center of the storm, and therefore see Dennis on his shard. It took some effort for me to get used to this strange way of traveling, but, with Violet and Eric there, I managed to do so in the end. We saw Dennis sit in front of his home, writing in his diary. He must be so bored here, I thought. Just imagine the idea of your life only existing within such a small landscape. I wouldn't see myself live through that for long. I wondered what kept him sane all these years, if he even still was sane. We saw him stand up, with effort, and walk to his dog. The dog walked towards him with a stick in his mouth. Dennis threw the stick, and the dog fetched it. We looked at each other, all of us feeling that Dennis probably didn't have long to live anymore. He seemed to be quite sick, and almost at the end of his life. There was nothing we could do for him however. We all read through his diary, and therefore knew what had happened before the Event. I felt strange. I had wanted to know who was responsible for the Event, and why, but. I now knew what had happened, and wasn't angry. I could actually understand his reasoning, and his feelings. I felt sad for Dennis, and what the decisions he had made had caused. I thought about how much the guilt must be eating at him, and felt sad for him. We stood there in silence for a few more minutes, and then decided to go back. Before we went back, Eric said he had something important to tell us. His ability to stay alive in our world, and live the way he was living now depended upon there being someone that lived on the Shard in the middle of the storm. Simply put, there needs to be a person living there which he can use to interface with our world. Even though the person will live their life normally, he can draw some sort of energy from the person, causing him to have the power to act within our world. Eric told us he couldn't explain it better than that, but that without a person living there, he would be unable to sustain the current world. And, since Dennis was about to die, someone would need to replace him. He looked at us both expectantly. We looked at each other, and sighed. Eric continued that it would have to be someone who was already connected to the energy he was using somehow. Dennis was related to the event so tightly that he was a possible conduit, even though he wasn't able to

communicate directly. Eric told us that, since Arthur had died since the Event, only very few people were now able to take over Dennis's place. And, of these people, only Violet and I would be possible candidates, since the rest would not be able to take the responsibility. I asked how long we would have to decide if we wanted to go, and who wanted to go. Eric said someone would have to replace Dennis in about a month. Basically, after his death, we would have around a week to replace him, after which the damage to the world would be irreversible. I replied that we would have to discuss this before we would make a decision. Eric said he understood that, and said he wouldn't have wanted this to happen if it wasn't absolutely necessary. He said he pitied us for even having to make this decision. Violet asked if two people could go. Eric replied that that would not be possible, because the link has to be made with one single person. The person has to live there alone, with just some animals as companions. He said he would try to ensure all possible life comforts would be there, but couldn't do more than that. I asked if the person living there would be able to teleport elsewhere using dreaming. Eric said that that would be possible, but only for limited amounts of time, since the person's soul has to be on the shard for most of the time. I asked if it would be possible for Violet and me to see each other again after one of the two of us had gone there. Eric said that that would indeed be possible. Both he and Violet looked at me with a puzzled face. He said that this was probably a good moment to send us back to our world, to prevent us from getting stuck here. We agreed, and woke up. Violet looked at me with disbelief, and I looked back in a similar way. We said nothing for a while, and then hugged each other. We were really disturbed by the idea of one of the two of us having to go there. We barely knew each other, but I felt like a bond had already formed that I didn't want to lose anymore. I was quite surprised by this, since I had never expected to feel this way about Violet. She looked me in the eyes, and asked me if I minded her speaking out her heart. I said I didn't. She told me she couldn't stand the thought of missing me. I told her I couldn't stand the thought of missing her. We cried in each others arms for quite some time.

The thought of one of the two of us having to leave was stuck in our heads for days. I had asked Violet if she minded me staying over at her place until we had to choose. She told me she would also really like that. We spent the hours we had together talking about our lives, hopes and dreams. It became clear to me that Violet shouldn't be the one to go, because she had more ties to this world than I had. My only goal in life had been finding out who had done the Event, and why. I had fulfilled that goal, so now I could easily take over the post as the watchman at the center of the Event. It wouldn't be a nice life, but it was an important task. Besides, I could still stay in touch with her, so not everything would be lost.

A week later, Eric, Violet and I met again. Eric told us we would have to choose soon, because we still would need to arrange transport. Violet and I looked at each other. We were silent for a few moments, with me building up courage to talk. I saw Violet open her mouth, but I spoke first. I said I would go. Violet looked at me with tears in her eyes. I told her she would stand to lose more than I would, because I had already reached the

goal I had been living for anyway. She would miss out on much more than I would. She said that that would be unfair, because I was a lot younger than she was. I told her that that would mean that it would take longer before someone else would have to take over the spot, so in a way, that would be better anyway. Besides, I said, I have a feeling that the person who lives there lives shorter than the persons outside anyway. So, we would probably live about as long. Eric said that that was a horrible thing to say, but it was true, because the person in the middle of the storm aged more quickly. It was an unfortunate side effect of living there. I asked Eric what I would need to do to prepare. He replied that I would only need to arrange my own transport. Since this was in the middle of the storm, he would be able to arrange almost anything I need. I asked him what kind of transport would suffice. He answered that the easiest would be to steal a glider, and use that to simply fly into the storm. I said that would take some effort. He nodded confirmingly. Eric asked if there were more questions we wanted to ask him, or if we should just keep it at this. I asked him if he knew where a glider was parked that we could easily steal. Violet said she knew a glider was parked two shards away that was barely protected. Eric said that she was correct in that. So, we agreed that I would steal that glider. I would travel there alone, but, since most of the transport is in cable cars, I could be with them by sleeping in the cable cars. We woke up to start planning my final journey. The first thing to arrange was access to travel permits for that route. But, since I had made good friends with the people at the cable car, this wasn't much of a problem. I provided them with a good bottle of whiskey, and soon I had passes to head to my destination. Violet and I spent the last night I had in the Capital together. We talked through the night. The next day, she waved me goodbye at the entrance of the cable car terminal. We hugged for a moment, and both cried out. I said goodbye, with my voice barely carrying at all. Violet nodded, but was unable to speak at all. I turned around, and entered the building. Tears rolled over my face as I entered the waiting area. I sat down, and felt as though my life had just ended. In a way, it had. I was giving up my everything, so others could live on. In a way, I was like a hero, but really, I just felt sad. Time crawled by as I waited for my departure time. When it was finally time, I entered the cable car. After I entered my cabin, I tried to relax. I didn't want Violet to see how sad I was feeling. I didn't want her to feel bad about letting me go, instead of going herself. A few minutes later, I decided that wouldn't be possible, so I tried to fall asleep without feeling relaxed. I just wanted to see her again, and be out of this hell. When I fell asleep, I met Eric, and no Violet. He told me that if I went to see her in this state, I would not be able to return to my own body, causing this mission to fail, and therefore causing me to force her to go instead. This got me somewhat back to my senses. Eric told me he was going to teach me to relax. He asked me to think of the most relaxing place I could think of. I felt myself suddenly sitting on the top of a hill, in a giant, undisturbed forest. There was a wind blowing through my hair, and I could see the trees in the forest move with the wind. But mostly, there was peace. Eric told me to not think about the problems I was having, but to just relax, and feel the wind. I tried to feel the wind, and smell the forest. However, I didn't really get relaxed, because I was too upset by the thought of

losing everything. Eric said, in a stern voice, that I needed to try harder. He changed the scene, to nighttime. The stars were beautiful. He asked me to try to count the stars. I thought this was stupid, but before I could say anything, Eric said that I just needed to do it, and not think about it. He said that I needed to stop thinking and start to calm down. So, I started counting the stars. As I continued counting, I could feel the stress starting to relieve somehow. So, even though I thought it was stupid, it did actually work wonders. I felt myself becoming calm again. He asked me if I started to really feel calm. I nodded. He asked me if I had started to make peace with my situation. I said I didn't really, but that I was starting to find the strength to carry out what needed to be done. I said that I knew I had no choice but to continue, so I would continue. Eric replied that he was happy to hear that, because that meant he didn't have to ask Violet to come after me, and take my spot. This thought got the reasoning me back. Eric told me that I seemed ready to talk to Violet. I nodded, and a few moments later, I was on a beach, with Violet standing next to me. She asked me how I was doing. I told her I was still stressed about it, but that I would be fine. I told her I was glad I didn't ask her to take this spot, because it wasn't a nice idea to have her take this spot instead of me. She told me she was glad that I was doing sort of okay, even though I obviously in quite a nasty spot. She said she felt sorry for me having to do this. We hugged on the beach, and then sat down, observing the waves. We were happy for that moment, but also aware of the importance of the task I had to execute. About fifteen minutes later, Eric turned up, telling me it was time for me to say goodbye to Violet again, and wake up. I gave her a hug, and woke up. I continued my journey with another cable car. The journey seemed to go quicker than I expected, and soon I was nearing the point where I would need to steal a glider. When I arrived, I could already see the glider stand ready. It wasn't even properly guarded, so I just walked up to it and took off. I was shouted at by people standing next to it, but I was already on my way. I set course for the center of the Entity, and moved forward. At this point, there was nothing I could do about it anymore. Even if I wanted, I couldn't turn back anymore. So, at that moment, I felt myself become aware of the situation I had put myself in. I would become a hermit at the center of the Event, doomed to stay there until the end of my life, all alone. I saw my life flash by in front of me, from the start to school to my live's mission, trying to find out who was responsible for the Event. Now that I had figured it all out, I felt a strange peace overcoming me. I felt like I was playing my role in life.

I flew into the Event, and somehow slowed down as I entered the center of it. I soon landed on one of the two shards. Well, landed, crashed would be a better word. I crashed into a bunch of bushes, and came to a sudden stop. As I exited the glider, I saw a dog greet me. It was extremely happy to meet someone here. It let me pet it for quite a while, and then suddenly started walking decisively. It looked back at me, signing me to follow him. I decided to follow him, because it seemed it really wanted me to follow. We crossed a bridge, and walked up to another shard. There, a house was standing. It was quite a strange house, made of all kinds of different parts. It didn't look too bad though. The dog walked inside, and I followed it. There, an old man was sitting in a chair. It

seemed he didn't have long to live anymore, and that all the strength had left him. I greeted him, and sat down next to him. He pointed at his diary, and I picked it up. With lots of effort, he asked me to continue writing in it. I promised him I would continue writing his diary. He then asked me to take care of the dog and the fish. I promised him I would do so. He looked at me in a confused way. I told him I knew what he had done, and why. I told him that, although it wasn't entirely up to me, I forgave him. This seemed to put him at rest. He took a few more breaths. Then, he stopped taking breaths. I closed his eyes, and sat down next to him.

I dug a grave for him a few hours later. The dog was observing me as I did so. I finished digging the grave, as the dog was still staring at me. I then looked for something to put Dennis in. I didn't really want to put him into the ground like this; I wanted to give him a proper burial. I found some wooden planks that had been laying there in the end, and decided to build a casket for him. I finished building it, and put Dennis in it. I found some candles, and lit them around the casket. Then, I held a simple service, commemorating him. I felt tears coming up again. Even though I didn't really know the guy, I felt sad for him. I lowered the casket into the hole, and stood next to the hole for a few minutes. Then, I started to put the ground back on top of it. With every movement of the spade I felt the weight of the world moving from his shoulders to mine. And, in a way, I was happy. After I finished putting back the ground, I sat down next to the grave. I closed my eyes, and concentrated on my breathing. I thought about Violet, and how she must be feeling at that moment. The thought of her being safe and sound made me feel relaxed. I fell asleep, and saw Violet in my dreams. I gave her a hug, and told her everything would be all right. She told me she was happy that I was doing this well. I told her I had made peace with my task within this world, and didn't feel sad about it anymore.

So, that's the story of my life, and how I ended up on this rock. I now live here, in the middle of nowhere, with nobody as company, except for my dog, and a fish. I have no way of leaving, but wouldn't leave even if I could. My life is simple, but has purpose, for, without me, nobody else would be alive. Also, I'm best friends with god.