

Light Life



Yoo

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“You’re busy, I know. So, I’ll cut the bullshit and get straight to it.

There’s chaos within you. You swallowed it a while back and have been keeping it down for a while now. But the anguish seems to be penetrating your soul, it’s distorting your face, and seeping through your skin. Breathe. You will be okay.

How does it feel to be the creator of your reality? Ah, but you haven’t been doing much creating lately have you? Who could blame you? So busy playing small. It’s funny don’t you think? How easy you can create or destroy yourself? That something so powerful can become so pitiful? Good thing you aren’t a victim anymore, else we’d still be fighting slavery. Oh, ssslavery. Breathe. Everything will be okay.

They gave you a name and a number, did they? I knew that wasn’t going to hold you for long. Oh no, you’re too big for that. I watched you latch onto people and things to fill the void. Oh, how big that void became! The more you stuffed in the less you felt, at one point I even tried to restart your heart. Oh, all that sstuff.

Not to mention all those distractions and diseases. You’re so dedicated to squandering your creative gift. You deserve a round of applause. Go ahead, clap with me. You’ve been chasing your tail for so long you completely forget that it was yours to begin with. Locked up part of your nice and tight, and then tamed the other half. I’d be bored inside a square cage too.

All that power stuffed inside a cubicle and limited to a few credentials, trying so hard to define yourself. Excuse me for laughing, but we both know that there is nothing that can define you. Nothing can contain you. Don't believe me? I wouldn't believe me either if I looked my slave self in the face. Lately nothing involves much YOU or needs much you. You look replaceable. You look square. Oh, all these fucking squaresss.

You were designed to adapt. Look at you now? So well adapted to the hell you created, with your own little homemade prisons, so dedicated to protecting your sstuff. Ugh, it feels dull and dense in here, dull and dense, like your consciousness, don't you think? No, you don't, but that's okay.

The shadows behind your good intentions seem to be growing larger. Do you see yourself blind? No looking back now. Okay, one last time. Remember when you played the victim? Poor old you and shame on me? Great, you've still got it. So, you play the victim again and pretend that nothing is your fault.

But whose fault is it then?

There I go, spilling your bullshit all over the place again! While I let you clear it up I'll sing you a song. I'll start, then you can tag along;

Reap what you sow

Reap what you sow

Your soul to be reaped

I foretold it so

Whistles the wind to the dying leaves as it blows them off their tree

Their tree?

Silly leaves owning trees

If they serve no purpose, they are worthless

Let the wind whistle them away

The leaves are free as they wished to be

Freedom to be, on or off the tree

Come on sing with me;

I reap what I sow

I reap what I sow

I reap my soul

She foretold it so

Stay with me, here we go;

Let's dig a hole

So, you can grow whole

Go-on dig, while I look for your soul

Climb inside, let me cover you up

Rot away things that's time has run out

As above, so below

You reap what you sow

You reap what you sow

Your soul to be reaped

I told you so."

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The light scans my palm and hoops of light form around my arms. The Aquabot lights up "Left hemisphere activated. Good morning Jet" a female voice with a French accent welcomes me, probably Colin's idea of on-board entertainment. Today's mission statement appears in front of me. My eye catches the number of days to completion: 01, Depth: 190m below sea level, Location: Desol Sea.

"Good morning mademoiselle" Colin smiles as he steps in and activates the right hemisphere.

"Right hemisphere activated. Good morning Captain Rovell. Hemisphere synchronization in process" the bot starts up.

“Where did you download the accent?” I ask while running through protocol.

“From the virtual reality simulator after I spent a week with a French model in the Bahamas” Colin laughs.

“The Bahamas?” I frown.

“The Bahamas were a range of tropical islands in the old world. You should get out more. Try going on a vacsi when we get back to the surface” he says as he gets comfortable.

“What the fuck is a vacsi?” I ask.

“A vacation simulation! There is an entire range of vacation destinations from the old world and a new selection of models to take along too” he brags.

“To do what exactly, fuck a hologram?” I smirk.

“To lighten the fuck up! It’s about time you use virtual reality for more than just fighting. I can see you rolling around your apartment wrestling holograms already” he mocks.

“Yeah, like I can imagine your naked ass penetrating light?” I laugh.

“You really need to get into the New Age Jet. It’s unlike you to be so submissive. If you had asked me, I’d thought that you’re doing your father a favor staying out of trouble all these years?”

“That’s why I didn’t ask you” I say sarcastically.

“Hemisphere synchronization complete, ready to get jiggy with it” the female voice interrupts right on time.

“Get jiggy with it?” I laugh “Your fucking around with the operating system is going to get us fired on the last day.”

“Oh yeah, it’s the last day then we’re out of here!” Colin cheers. I spot him grinning slyly. I know that face. It means drinking, fucking and snorting. A few months in the dark lifeless abyss turns us into rock stars when we surface. We’re down here for two months with one-month vacation in between, so we try to make up for the fun we missed when we surface. Luckily Light City provides enough stimulation to keep anyone going for days on end, so things tend to get messy when they let us loose. Colin slides an attachment over to my hemisphere. Five female robots with matching outfits dance past me. I can tell they are bots because they all look identical. Perfectly symmetrical. One of them moves towards me shaking her breasts in my face. She reaches out to stroke my cheek “Hello Prince, join us for a night and you’ll wake up a king.” I move my face away to avoid her ‘touch’ and swipe the attachment back to Colin’s hemisphere.

“Ah, come on! An entire evening of celebrity treatment with professional party guests to make us feel like the hero’s we are?” he insists and opens the ad again and clears his throat like he is preparing to make an announcement; “Ladies and gentlemen for one night, and one night only I bring you the Creators of the Desolink and the Uniter of Light City, Jet and Colin!” I can’t help but laugh, “You’re a fucking joke. My father must’ve accidently implanted a sense of humor along with your bionic heart.”

He ignores my remark and reads the ad out loud “A special offer for UNlimited pleasure. Choose the King Package today and you can bring a friend for free. That’s it, I’m convinced” he skips to the booking section.

“You don’t take much convincing” I turn and watch him upload both our profiles.

“You aren’t fucking serious Colin? How do you even have access to my profile?” I lean over to try and stop him.

“I’ve been around” Colin laughs as he scans his Palmer to pay. “Transaction completed, your booking has been secured.” The group of robots cheers with a glass of champagne in hand and wink at Colin. The one with the boobs blows me a kiss. It floats towards me and pops in front of my face. “Classy” I mumble. Colin laughs. He always gets me into shit like this when we return to the surface.

“You are becoming more like those robots the more parts you get” I scowl.

“And you are getting more cut off from reality with every rotation. How about you just enjoy the ride? Besides, we should celebrate the completion of the Desolink. We deserve some recognition for almost a decade in the Underworld, and I’m pretty sure Aquanauts aren’t planning a medal ceremony.” He’s right. No medals for city service especially if you’re paid as much as we are.

“And it’s about time you get back in the game. You can only stay angry for so long. I’m pretty sure your dad doesn’t give a shit anymore.”

“Yeah, he’s too busy ‘fixing the human flaws’” I say sarcastically. My neck gets tense.

“Your dad did a good job on me, so I’m not complaining. You should be more grateful, I mean, without your dad I wouldn’t be here and let’s face it, you wouldn’t have any friends” Colin laughs at his own joke. I want to kick him in his

recently rejuvenated face, but then I remember that he is fifty-three and to respect the elderly.

“Yeah, old timer, tell me at what point do you swop your right to vote for a mechanical part? Have they started writing the robot laws yet? My neck tenses up again. I move it side to side. Colin is still laughing but at this point I’m not sure if it’s at me or still at his own joke. He eventually calms down and wipes the tears from his face “Fuck, you can be so dramatic. You really need to have more sex. Let’s finish this job so we can relieve some of the tension in your groin.”

“Check neutral buoyancy and disembark substation” Colin commands.

“Buoyancy checked. Commence disembark.” I respond. The docking clamps disconnect, and the bot remains suspended in the water column.

“Buoyancy stable” I confirm while preparing the inspection scanner.

“Navigating to inspection point” Colin moves his palms forward to accelerate the engines. The steering hologram lights up around his hands and the directional arrows float in front of us like they are outside in the water column. Colin controls steering and navigation from the right hemisphere. I operate the tools on the left. Basically, he takes me to work. It took a few years for our movements to become synchronized, but now it’s second-nature.

“I’m going to miss this place” I say as I look up and change the hemisphere’s transparency so that the spherical roof becomes transparent. I scan the darkness that surrounds us. There is nothing to see in the Desol Sea. The ocean became desolate after The Urge swept the globe twenty-seven years ago. The pandemic coincided with the melting of the ice-caps which shifted global temperatures and

caused devastating weather conditions. Survivors fled to the safe zones that are now collectively known as Light City while the infected congregated in pockets of habitable terrain. The old world was destroyed and after they managed to contain the spread of The Urge, Light City suffered food shortages that lead to the use of modified crops. The crops needed increasing amounts of fertilizers to grow and now only grow under controlled conditions. All the agricultural runoff ended up in the ocean and since the melted ice-caps stopped the oceanic engine, fertilizer spills created rapid increases in algal blooms which in turn deplete oxygen levels in the already stagnant waters around Light City transforming the ocean into a dead zone. Obviously, after the devastation nobody gave too much thought to the consequences of where what goes, as long as it grows. I wasn't born yet and Colin doesn't talk about it, so I guess it must have been intense because he rarely takes anything seriously.

"You don't have a sentimental bone in your body" Colin interrupts my trail of thought. "Aquabot secured to tunnel" the bot confirms. My attention goes back to the job and the hemisphere automatically darkens to focus my attention on the tunnel. I separate my fingers to open the clamp and move my arm to secure it in position. The tunnel connects the two parts of Light City that is currently separated by the Desol Sea. It will enable faster transportation and in and exports that will accelerate growth and expansion of the New World. 'We are the Light', the Light City motto and the driving force for the New Age floats past my screen, to remind us of our purpose.

"Activate scanner and charge current" I command. "Requesting clearance to shoot?"

“Request granted” the bot confirms and commences the countdown. “Zero” I shoot. The electromagnetic current passes through the bridge and a three-dimensional image of the bridge forms as the current runs the expanse and disappears into the distance.

“Do you think they’re going to reassign us?” Colin asks.

“Nah, I think it’s about time you retired. You are well over your expiration date” I joke.

“You cause so much shit they would send me on retirement to get rid of you” he hits back. He’s right. I’ve never done well with authority. I’ve been locked up twice. The second time they had to catch me. I don’t fit in up there. That’s why I’m down here. So yeah, when I don’t put my energy to good use I break things. Everybody copes in their own way.

“Connection completed” the bot announces. The 3D tunnel floats between us. We stare at it, taking in the fact that the current just ran the expanse of a tunnel we took a decade to build in a few seconds. Now it’s all over.

“I guess that’s it then?” I ask neutrally. “You ready to go shoot some zombies outside Light City?” Colin mocks me in a childish voice. “I’ve done some serious damage on the VR gamer at home” he adds.

“Do you think the infected are the walking dead?” I think aloud.

Colin’s face drops. “The infected aren’t dead Jet.”

I can hear the tension in his voice, so I just drop it. I think he lost someone to The Urge, but like I said, he doesn’t talk about it. The Urge made people act

emotionless and detached from society and when thousands of infected left behind everything they owned and congregated in the wild, you could imagine many believed it to be a real-life zombie apocalypse and the infected naturally became the new age zombies.

“So, when you’re not fucking French holograms you’re shooting zombies in your living room? Nice life.” I change the subject to lighten the mood.

“Says the guy who gets a kick out of fighting in a pain simulator? I like my face, thanks” he says sarcastically. He gets his face rejuvenated, so he looks about my age, mid-twenties. Light City is obsessed with youthfulness and appearance even if it knocks off a few years of your life expectancy. You only live once right? That’s probably why my father’s bionic parts are the fastest growing industry in Light City. “Orgonic Industries, we fix flaws” I see my father wink at me. My neck stiffens again. I shake my shoulders to release the tension. It’s about time I get back in the fighting simulator to feel better.

“How about I leave the fighting to you and you leave the love making to me?” Colin continues.

“Love?” I laugh. The closest I’ve come to that is taking MDMA. My mom died of blood cancer when I was six, hence my father’s obsession to fix the human flaws. There is no space to love a kid if you don’t even love being human. There’s probably a simulation on VR or a supplement available on Nigredo for love by now. Nigredo originally prevented the onset of The Urge, but so many different add-ons have been made available it has replaced physicians completely. It tests, diagnoses, administers and regulates everything you can think of. You really have no say in the matter, you either comply or die.

Oh, and The Urge is a neurological virus that spread across the globe at the time of the shifting global temperatures. There is no known cure for The Urge, so prevention formed the basis on which the new society was built. That's where Nigredo comes in, the substance is diffused through your left palm and Nigredo zones are mandatory in every household and scattered around the city to check that Nigredo is kept below Urge susceptibility levels.

"Congratulations, the Desolink has been successfully completed. Please return to the substation and await collection" the bot announces. "Sure thing hun" Colin winks. "Fuck yeah, we're out of here! Detaching from docking station" Colin cheers and releases the bot from the tunnel. "Buoyancy check" Colin runs through protocol again and navigates back to the substation. The substation usually connects to either side of the Aquabot and each hemisphere opens into separate lodging wings that are joined together by a communal area. But since we won't be communing in there any time soon I secure the tools and prepare for collection.

"Collection in 3 minutes, commence safety check" the bot announces. We scan our palms "Nigredo levels stable" it confirms. We slowly make our ascent. The hemispheres automatically adjust to protect us from the increasing light which takes a while to get used to after being in the dark for so long. The Aquabot attaches to the lift and we are raised to the surface onto the deck. The ship looks like a giant floating handkerchief. It's called Sting-Ray, so I guess that's where they drew their inspiration from. Not that I've seen a sting ray in real life, like I said, they were all wiped out.

I open my left palm to activate my Palmer and check that my eye-wear is set to auto adjust to the light. Palmers are holographic personal computers. They are implanted into each citizen's left wrist and navigated with finger movements. It activates when the temples connect to the palm and the hologram is projected in front of you. It was made freely available during The Urge pandemic to help connect survivors, but it quickly became an extension of each citizen and a pillar of the New World. Over time advancements led to automated UV protection, instant access to your personalized database, banking, social media, remote home control and health stats with a flick of the wrist.

"Pressure stable" the bot confirms before the hemispheres open out to the deck of the ship. The lenses in front of my eyes polarize as I step out.

"Welcome back captains, the general requests a meeting straight away" the lieutenant welcomes us. We shake hands and follow the lieutenant to the hovercraft.

"They don't waste any time" Colin mutters as we step inside and take up the two empty seats. We strap in and the hovercraft takes off. The lenses disappear, and a hologram is activated by our presence. The general is sitting at his desk. I'm not sure if this is a recording or a live feed so I check his response "Nice leg sir" I point to his new bionic leg. I recognize the brand, Orgonic. He straightens his leg with a grin, clearly proud of his choice. Yes, the hologram is live.

"It's been a while, good to see that you boys still look sane after being down there for so long" he jokes. The general has been around longer than anyone I know. He got me a spot in Aquabot training after my father called in a favor to get me out of his way. He practically raised me.

“Jet barely made it, sir” Colin jokes and the general tries to hold back his laughter. He coughs and continues. “Congratulations on completing the Desolink gentlemen. The unity of Light City will enable unprecedented growth and expansion and we have you to thank for that. As you both know the fresh water within our borders have been depleted and the water we have in the underground circulatory pumps are limited. The Aquanauts will now be merged with The Harvest teams and all Aquabots will be adapted to land resource acquisition to harvest resources from the infected areas. The new bots will harness the same hemisphere technology, so we are recruiting all the Aquabot captains that have obtained high levels of synchronicity to undergo training as soon as possible. More information will be given at the training facility and collection times will be sent to you within the next 72 hours.”

“Looks like we’ll be shooting zombies after all” Colin nudges my shoulder.

“Aw, looks like you won’t be fucking any robots anymore?” I fatten my lower lip mockingly.

The general coughs again to get our attention. “I would like to speak to Jet in private. Captain Rovell you are dismissed.” Colin salutes and his audio and visual feed is distorted so only I can see and hear the hologram.

“Captain, I am sorry to inform you, but your father passed away a few hours ago. He was a remarkable man and it is a great loss to the entire Light City. On behalf of the Aquanauts we send our condolences. The funeral arrangements have already been made and have been sent to you. Take the next few days to attend to your personal matters. Training will commence thereafter.” I didn’t see that

coming. My father and I haven't spoken in years. I don't know how to react to the news.

"Permission to end the session, sir? I request.

"Permission granted" the general nods and the hologram disappears.

"What was that about? Colin asks while scrolling through the latest trends on his Palmer. He selects a gray jacket. "I ordered the new acid resistant coat by Sterile. They have it in gray, your favorite color, so I sent you one too."

"My father died" I say neutrally.

"Well, that's a relief I almost thought they were promoting you! There is already hardly enough room for me in the Aquabot with your over-inflated ego" he says without flinching and keeps scrolling through the new trends. The model on his palm takes up a different pose every few seconds.

"Fuck you, Colin" I say, and the model looks at me shocked.

"You'd love to" Colin says and turns to me with a concerned look on his face, like he didn't expect my reaction.

"Are you okay?" he says in a sympathetic tone. I preferred him joking about it.

"I don't feel anything" I reply bluntly. Colin backs off and doesn't say anything. I watch him scroll through his news feed and order more stuff online. I turn to the window.

The cloud cover seems denser than usual. Since The Urge, Light City has been covered with a permanent layer of clouds. I've never seen the sun, but the

brightness of the lights in Light City makes up for it. I watch the city grow larger as we fly closer. The black ocean below and the layer of dark gray clouds above creates a tunnel vision effect, and the light at the end of the tunnel are giant holograms dancing around buildings, like strippers around poles. Our forefathers knew how to leave a place thoroughly fucked up, tightly wrapped in permanent cloud cover and surrounded by a dead sea. I laugh a little. Home is where the heart is, whatever that means?

2

I loosen my tie. It feels like a noose around my neck. I close the car door and throw the ring on the dashboard. It was my father's wedding ring. They thought I'd want it. I laugh at the thought. I sit back into the tanned leather seat and take a drag from the vape. I inhale deeply. The funeral wasn't that bad and usually I don't like family gatherings. He died of organ failure after multiple failed bionic heart transplants. He was well over the average life expectancy of forty-something, but considering that a man of his stature should be immortal, it's a funny fate. I laugh as I exhale. With the outbreak of The Urge came an increased susceptibility to previously harmless viruses and bacteria, bringing average organic life expectancy down to around forty, with the majority of deaths due to cancer and heart disease. But new diseases pop up like weeds around here, so you never know what you're going to get. Orgonic Industries managed to double life expectancy, if you can afford it, and has become the leading bionic organ producer in Light City.

As you can tell we were like two peas in a pod, if the other pea did as it was told, which it didn't. He would try to beat me into a square person, so I could fit into

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