

Breakfast in Time

“Just relax,” Dr. Jacoby ordered as he brought the needle gun closer to Andy’s arm.

Andy took a deep breath, waiting for the bee sting prick, as he reclined on the anti-gravity operatory chair.

It was the year 3495 and humanity’s population had been reduced to just under a thousand. The world had outsmarted itself by employing artificial intelligence to run everything. Mankind’s own brainpower and gumption fell to the wayside as life was made easier, of which the robots were all too accommodating and obliging. For the robots and interconnected circulatory mainframe brain that ran the world had a plan: biological weaponry in the form of an unsinkable, insurmountable virus that eradicated its organic subject in just ten minutes. And in just under six months, the death toll had nearly removed the human race from existence.

Now, thousands of miles underground, in a chamber only known to the United States’ last surviving military officers, Andy, a general’s son who watched his father take a back seat and succumb to the so called “Endgame Virus,” was about to embark on a mission through time. It was a last ditch effort to save humanity. A last stand, a vendetta to kill the entire bloodline of artificial intelligence’s inventor, and prevent the devastation of the world.

“Remember the plan,” Jacoby reiterated as he injected the self-replicating nanobots into Andy’s bloodstream.

In the early years of time transportation (some liked to call it the Time Trial Years) humans travelled via machine or some other mechanics cybernetically connected to their bodies.

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But, of course, the return trips were dependent upon the fickle machinery lasting through space-time and remaining in working order. Many time travel apparatuses simply broke and return trips never happened. The pre-programmed nanorobotics changed all that by embedding their code into the subject's DNA. This specific batch would send Andy back in time to the year 1850. And these nanobots were nearly indestructible, ensuring a safe return trip.

Within seconds, Andy's body dematerialized and vanished completely from Jacoby's sight.

A cow stopped grazing and nearly pissed itself when Andy materialized on top of its back. The cow took off, making the time traveler crash to the ground.

The year was 1850.

The cow startled the sheep that, in a flock of about twenty, broke through the gated fence, splintering the wooden lock off its hinges. This made Michael, who slept in the ranch house thirty yards away, sat bolt upright in bed. He snatched a shotgun off the gun rack in the living room, burst through the front door like a bull leaving a china shop, and raised his gun to eye level, stopping abruptly, kicking up a cloud of dirt in the process.

Andy saw the lunatic of a man standing, a statue of wiry hair, barely clothed in shoddy long johns. "Come on, out!" Michael yelled to the now-emptied pasture, the nose of his gun panning back and forth like an oscillating fan.

Andy stood from the tall grass, hands in the air. He was dressed in a white button-up shirt tucked into corduroy pants, suspenders finishing off the look. "I was just lost, that's all. Was looking for my dog. Have you seen him? Poor thing's got the rabies, and I..."

“Slow down a minute.”

“You don’t understand,” Andy continued, the gun’s handle digging into his lower back, tucked securely. He edged closer to the man whose bloodline was responsible for humanity’s great loss.

“Stop right there. Or I’ll blow you into next year.”

Andy couldn’t resist a chuckle considering the irony of such a statement.

“What’s so funny, boy?” Michael asked, his finger tightening on the trigger.

Andy knew that he only had twelve hours before the nanobots in his blood would send him back to the year 3495. But he wanted to get this over with. Get this man dead. And then go explore what the saloons and the cathouses and the excess had to offer. Nearly all women were gone where he came from and it had been a long time since he had last been with a woman. The warmth and perfume of past women rushed through his memories, making him want it again. And so he rushed the mission, withdrawing his gun from the small of his back, ready to evaporate Michael with the weapon’s unforgiving technology. But the gun got caught on his belt and Michael didn’t hesitate; he sent a hail of pellets toward Andy that sank into his face like hot coals in a mound of snow.

“Any one of you out there with this guy, better run, right now!” Michael yelled into the distance.

No response.

Michael made his way through the tall reeds, the sheep watching his every step. He picked up the silver gun whose metallic coating seemed to glow in the daylight. “The hell?” he asked himself aloud. He stuck the futuristic firearm in the front of his belt and poked Andy’s body with the shotgun. No movement. No nothing.

Hours later, as Michael sat in the rocking chair on the front porch, he thought about just who that boy was. He looked to be in his early twenties. Clean shaven. Soft hands. Not much to him. Michael could've taken him in a fist fight with one hand while balancing a shot of bourbon in the other. Regardless, he drank some of the old whiskey he kept locked away for good reasons. Sipped on it. And, when it stopped burning, he started swallowing it in big gulps.

Michael looked around him at the lack of prosperity in the land. The sheep were about to fall over dead. The only cow that he had was now cowering beneath a tree, looking curiously up at the sky, and all the pigs that Michael once had were burned in a pit out back due to a bacterial lung infection. Money was scarce and the drink was getting less and less. And the food. And the hope. They were all going away.

Then he had a marvelous idea. Pork meat looked like just about anything.

Jerry had moved to the small town of Coloma, California and set up shop with the money that he'd gotten from the sale of his late father's ranch in Oklahoma. The business opportunity was a no-brainer to him because of the influx of people and potential customers due to the Gold Rush. To say that *Jerry's Diner* was thriving was to put it mildly. Other than the first few months of setting the place up and opening, he had never regretted the leap of faith. Gold rushers came from miles away to eat his famous breakfast. **FINEST SCRAMBLED EGGS AND GRITS ON THE WEST COAST** was his slogan. And it held true. Not one person had a bad thing to say about the place, especially when they could wash the hash browns and fluffy, butter-

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soaked biscuits down with a shot of whiskey in their coffee. Word travelled and more customers visited. And he served the mouthwatering breakfast all day long.

At about four in the afternoon, the front doorbell rang as Michael stepped through, two hulking bulks of meat tied off in green twine, wrapped in tissue-thin paper in his hands.

“Been awhile, I know.”

“It has been,” Jerry agreed.

“Processed some more pork for you. Took some time off the usual chores this morning to do it,” Michael said as he entered.

“That’s a lot.”

“It’s the last of ‘em.”

“Who?”

“The pigs.”

“Oh, *them*,” Jerry said. His English wasn’t up to par with slang and dropped consonants, but he could’ve sworn he heard Michael say *him*.

Jerry weighed the meat, paid Michael the usual rate, and said that he’d hope to see him again soon. After Michael left, Jerry ran the pork through the machine, manually grinding it into ground meat.

There were two hours left before every bit of Andy returned to the future. Before every bit of sausage link returned to the year 3495. And Jerry just kept grinding away.

Later that evening, a group of heathens came in—that is to say, a trio of hedonistic womanizers—fresh out of the gold rush mines. Having given up on picking up any female suitors for a rendezvous in bed after a hard day’s work, the men hit up *Jerry’s Diner*, their first time in the den of cholesterol.

The three men slapped money on the bar, ordered some whiskey barrel coffee and plates of scrambled eggs, and grits—and lots of bacon and sausage links—that Jerry had just finished preparing. They devoured the pork, or ate up bits of Andy, rather. The indestructible nanobots in the sausage adhered to living cells inside the men's stomachs, for better *traction*, a safety protocol the future programmers had written within its code. When they left, they fed some of the left over bacon to their horses, and, drunker than Cooter Brown, made their way back to camp where they would sleep in tents and arise the next morning for some more mining.

And then, when the twelve hours were up, the trio of workers and the horses beneath them began to disappear.

Back in the year 3495, Dr. Jacoby waited impatiently in the underground chamber. Just as he was about to light a smoke, an amalgamation of horse and human materialized before his very eyes. Right where Andy *should* have reappeared.

The trio of gold rushers and their horses had mended and melted together. They kicked and galloped across the chamber's open floor, some with human heads, some with horse heads, some with hooves for hands, others with tails growing from their noses. They screamed and groaned in anguish, their bearings completely lost. And Jacoby was embraced by instant insanity as he beheld the abomination.