



OUT OF THE
BUBBLE

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CHAPTER 1
» WELCOME IN THE TWENTY-THIRD CENTURY «

It is the year 2222, and humanity is in a war, because it has completely lost control of its self-created machines. Hundreds of the so-called Creaks are moving along the east coast of North America. They are a kind of human robots that have evolved through a series of failed experiments. As a result of mankind's highly advanced technology, the Creaks have become completely independent and are also able to reproduce themselves. However, the humans have managed to create last retreats for themselves. Where once large cities were and life just bloomed, today giant half-spherical protective bladders extend to protect the last survivors. These bubbles are completely impermeable to the creaks, but life inside the safe zones is no longer really meaningful. The youth in especially, suffers terribly from the restrictions and there are always deaths occurring, because the appeal of leaving the protected and restricted areas is just too much for some.

»What a load of bullshit!«, says Thomas to himself while he turns off the holoframe.

At the same moment the doorbell rings. He looks down through the glass wall to the street. It's John and Claire.

»Hector open up for them!«, he calls to the empty apartment.

»Of course Thomas.«, a metallic sounding male voice resounds from different directions in the apartment.

»Hey guys, you won't believe what just happened in the...«

»Thomas, we have massive news.«, interrupts John, who is just stepping over the threshold.

It never means anything good, when John shows such a cheerful expression on his face.

»What have you taken from your dad this time?«, asks Thomas, unimpressed, but still a bit curious.

»Yessss«, Claire shouts. »Your super awesome, way too rich friend here, has ripped off another fabulous new gadget from his dad.«

»A tent!«, adds John.

»What do you mean? Just a tent?«

John at first just shows a sceptical look before he starts talking. »My friend, how long have you known me now? No it's not a normal tent, of course.«

Suddenly he turns his gaze to the empty room. »Hey Hector, pack up Thomas stuff for camping.«

»It's a pleasure!« the voice replies.

»Go on, tell him what we're doing today!«, Claire yells brightly.

»Today...we're going outside!«, John shouts at the top of his voice.

Thomas begins to catch on. »You want to get out of the Bubble?«, he says in a quavering voice.

»Yes you giant baby. Now stop being scared, it's going to be great.«, John replies in a surprisingly soft tone.

Without saying a single word, Thomas watches the closets open and close on their own and the clothes fly into the bag.

After a moment's silence, Thomas registers that Claire is looking at him hopefully and excitedly. He gathers all his bravery and says in a focused voice, »Let's go, friends.«

CHAPTER 2
»ATTENDED OF A SMILE«

What about this place?«, asks Claire her two companions, while she tries to communicate with a purposeful look that this place would be perfect.

»Well, I don't know,«, John answers hesitantly while looking around.

Before he can say anything else, Thomas, who obviously understood Claire's signal, agrees. »Yes, here would be perfect, I think. There's a little creek right there, and if it rains too hard, we'll also have this ruin right next to us to take cover.«

Claire tries to hold back a smile.

John turns back to his friends and trills in a happy voice: »Okay, then I may now ceremoniously present to you the Doormeyer Tent 70002. It is the most modern one of the modern ones. Watch and be amazed.«

He throws it on the ground and everyone watches in amazement to see what will happen. One second. Two seconds. Three seconds. Four seconds. But nothing happens.

Five seconds. Six seconds. Eight seconds. Ten seconds. But still nothing changes.

»Yo, what's up with that. The guy in the commercial said all you have to do is throw it on the ground and it's going to build up.«

John picks it up again and inspects it carefully. Suddenly there is a loud noise and the small package bursts open in the middle of his hands and unfolds into a huge comfortable apartment. John is so startled by this that he lets slip a loud, much too high-pitched scream for his normally deep voice. Even he himself has to laugh.

Finally, all three sit together at the fireplace that was included in the tent package and roast some marshmallows over the fire. It has already gotten dark, but the night seems peaceful. Only a few crickets can still be heard chirping.

»I was a little scared at first that we were going out of the safety zone to spend a night out here, but now under the stars in the middle of nature, I feel incredibly comfortable.«, Claire says, taking a deep breath from the fresh air.

»Yeah, it's a lot different than being in there in the bubble just gawking at the skyscraper facades.«, Thomas continues.

»I'll leave you guys alone for a minute and go to the toilet.« John says.

But as soon as John is gone, something strange happens. Claire slides over to Thomas and leans her head against his shoulder. She's never done that in all the years they've known each other. Stunned by the emotions he feels in those moments, three minutes seem like only 10 seconds.

Then John comes back and Claire immediately stands up.

»Alright guys, I'm going to bed.«, she announces in a quiet voice, and goes into the tent.

On Thomas' lips, a broad smile remains.

CHAPTER 3
»THE NOISE«

Thomas unexpectedly wakes up in a drench of sweat. Normally, he sleeps like a rock, but today, here in the tent next to Claire and beyond the safe zone, he has a queasy feeling.

It's like his instinct has told him that something scary is happening right now. For a second, he looks at Claire, who has just turned on her side. He pulls a lock of her long golden blonde hair out of her face. It's amazing how lovely she is, even when she's asleep. Again, that strong prickling in his belly runs through him and he questions whether he will ever be able to tell her that he loves her. But even before Thomas can finish this thought process, he jerks by

a shrill, clinking sound from outside the tent. Quiet as a skulking cat, he moves to the window to see where it's coming from.

»I'm sure it's nothing. I'm sure that was just a robocat abandoned out here by its owner because of a malfunction. Or maybe it was a big cricket.«, he tells himself, so that his huge fear of what might be out there won't get the upper hand. Although he knows that no cricket in the world is big enough to be able to make such a loud noise.

When he arrives at the peephole, he immediately takes a giant leap backwards whereby he almost lands on Claire.

»Holy shit!«, he whispers, biting his tongue to keep from raising his voice. Only a blink later, the two friends are also awake. Thomas has woken them up immediately, to tell them about what is outside, lurking in the dark summer night.

»G-G...guys, y-y-you won't believe...w-what I saw.«, he stutters so quietly that John and Claire can only read his lips.

»What is it?« asks John.

»Psshhttt! Not so loud!«, Thomas interrupts him.

»Maybe a cricket, or an abandoned robocat?«, he continues ironically and over-quietly.

»No man. There're creaks out there. They probably found this sleeping spot as nice as we did.«

Now, also Claire suddenly wakes up completely. Until now, she stunned has been watching Thomas' well-shaped, soft lips as they move. »What? That's not possible. There haven't been any creaks sighted here for years.«

Together they scramble to the peephole to make sure Thomas isn't kidding them. With wide eyes, they look at the group of the sleeping monsters.

CHAPTER 4 »NO WEAKNESS«

We are dead. Yep, we're definitely dead as a doornail.«, John points out dryly while continuing to look outside.

Tears have come to Claire's eyes. She just sits there in silence, mentally already about to finish with her life. In school, they are taught how the Creaks work, they learn the history of the war that has now lasted for 50 years and the billions of victims who have died as a result of their brutality. In informatics and social sciences, they learn about their behavior patterns and in biotechnology they talk about their body and the way they reproduce, but never once was mentioned where their weak point is. Never once were they shown how to fight the mixture of technology, humans and the deepest evil. At this moment, Claire thinks back to everything and realizes there is no way out.

She ends her thought process when she feels a touch. It is John, he has taken her in his arms to comfort her.

»Why you? Why not Thomas?«, thinks Claire. But then she is astonished to realize how good it feels.

Thomas can't look more than a second, before his jealousy grabs him.

»I'll save you.«, he whispers over to Claire. She pulls away from John.

With surprised expressions, they both look at him.

»I mean we're saving you.«, he improves. »Right John?«

He replies: »That are five living Creaks dude. Three armored planes and a hundred soldiers could show up here right now and they still wouldn't die.«

»I'm not talking about killing them man.«, Thomas points out clearly. »We'll sneak around them. At night, they can't see anything.«

»That's really an awesome plan, but you seem to have forgotten that the Creaks can hear three times better in the dark than they normally do, and so their sensors pick up even the slightest sound.«

Claire, who has now watched this discussion long enough, wipes the last tears from her face and joins in. »Do we have any other choice? If we're not out of here at sunrise, they'll see us anyway. Then we're definitely doomed.«

»But...All right.«, John caves in, not wanting to initiate another discussion, especially with Claire.

»How much time do we have?«, asks Thomas in a focused voice. John squeezes his wrist, after which a small hologram comes out of his arm. Before he presses it again to make it disappear, he whispers hectically: »20 minutes left.«

CHAPTER 5 »CYCRANIT FIBERS«

Noiselessly Thomas opens the exit. First, he carefully puts one foot out of the tent, then he pulls the other one out. In these moments, the scenery seems like a silent movie. From time to time, you can hear the soft rustling of leaves.

Thomas carefully fumbles his way along the path without hitting a tree or stumbling over a root. Close behind him Claire follows at first and afterwards John. At least that's what he thought, but when he turns around, he only sees Claire behind him.

»Where's John?«, he forms with his lips.

Claire only answers with a bewildered shrug.

»Here I am.«, it resounds from the darkness behind them. Then a loud beep starts to ring out. Suddenly, the shrill, clinking sound is heard next to them again. This time John and Claire can also hear it. The latter has to hold back a cry of shock with the greatest of effort. They hear a mechanical movement, but surprisingly nothing more happens.

»He's turned on the side.«, an approaching whisper sounds behind Claire.

»Where the hell have you been and what have you done?«, breathes Thomas back at him.

»I couldn't leave the tent here after all. It's made of Cycranite fibers. Do you know how immensely expensive that is? My father will kill me if I lose that.«

Thomas tries to repress a derogatory comment and continues on his way. His friends follow him.

CHAPTER 6 »SACRIFICE«

We've almost made it!«, whispers Thomas a little louder to the back, since they are already some meters away from the Creaks.

»We have to hurry it's already beginning to dawn.«, he says to himself.

At the same moment there is first a rustle and then a flapping sound next to them in the bushes. It comes so unexpectedly that Thomas and Claire can only watch while John takes a step backwards in shock and trips over a root. He tries to catch himself and stumbles backwards a bit more before he has to give up the fight against his balance and falls down. But he doesn't land softly, as he would have expected from the moss-covered forest ground. Instead, his back hits hard, cold metal and he consequently makes a horrible scream.

A moment later, this scream, is drowned out by five much louder screams. A horrible chorus of technically distorted, crooked sounds echoes through the whole forest.

Claire watches while John slowly picks himself up and begins to run for his life.

»Ruuunnnn!!«, he shouts at her.

Claire, still totally stunned from the shock, comes to her senses through this scream, turns around and starts running towards the safe zone as well.

In front of her, far away, she sees Thomas sprinting.

»Faster!« she calls to John in the back, who has never been particularly athletic. She turns around and sees three pursuers right behind him. While she is still wondering where the other two Creaks have gone, they cut their way off. She sees no possibility to escape. In front of her, two of the monsters are waiting and behind her, three more follow. Suddenly, John gets his last breath together and screams his head off. Then the two Creaks in front of her start running towards her and John. Claire stops in total shock. In the meantime, John has reached and is standing next to her. He has a couple of seconds until the Creaks catch up.

»Claire, I have to tell you something...«, he gasps.

»John!«, she replies, »Now is not the time to be making any speeches.«

She notices the Creaks approaching from both sides just a few meters away.

»It totally is, right now is the right time.«, John affirms. »Every time I see you I'm happy. You brought the sun into my heart and you do me so incredibly good. You are all I can think of and the only person I would have liked to spend the rest of my days with, is you. I want you to know this one more thing...«, he pushes Claire away from him, behind a tree.

She can blurry see how the Creaks are still 5 meters away from him.«

»Claire, I've fallen in love to you.«

No sooner having finished this sentence, the Human Robots from both sides collide and crush John in their middle.

Claire just screams, »Noooo!!!«, while she saves herself towards the safe zone.

However, a Creak survived the impact and begins to run after her. Claire recognizes this from the horrible noises coming from behind her. His sharp knife claws reach for her but he doesn't catch her. A few steps away, she sees Thomas waiting in the safe zone.

»Come on!«, he motivates her.

Suddenly she feels something pulling at her T-shirt. With the last of her strength she tears herself free and jumps the last meter into the safe zone and the monster attached to her, bursts into a thousand pieces, when it comes into contact with the protective bubble.

CHAPTER 7 »RESURRECTION«

Oh my god Claire... how are you?«, Thomas asks worriedly.
She goes at him like a madman.

»You're really still asking that?! Instead of helping us, you just ran for your own life and fucked off. I just got hunted by fucking Creaks and was able to save myself by a hair, while you were watching me from out here like this was an action movie. John got crushed between those retarded monsters and I had to watch that happen. It's my fucking fault he's dead, he was trying to save me and you're actually asking how I'm doing right now.«

She sinks to the floor and starts crying.

»Claire, I-I-I...«, Thomas stammers, completely overwhelmed.

»Get out of here.«, Claire says with the last of her energy.

»What?«, he asks.

»Go on, fuck off like you did before!«, she shouts at him. »I don't want to see you anymore.«

Claire just lies on the floor now and hears Thomas' footsteps moving away from her. She lies there like that for probably ten minutes, looking up at the sky. No one, not even herself, knows what she is thinking.

Suddenly she hears footsteps again.

»Thomas, I told you to get out of here, man.«, she points out loudly.

The footsteps come closer.

»Go now!«, she starts yelling.

Then the footsteps stop. She turns her glance to Thomas and notices that it isn't Thomas who is standing there.

»Well, do we want to go camping again next weekend?«, John asks and laughs.