



THE FUTURE WAS CANCELLED

Dystopische Kurzgeschichten und Illustrationen aus dem Leistungskurs Englisch
Bader (Q3) in Zusammenarbeit mit dem Wahlpflichtfach Kunst Aden (10).

Terry Rose - Kid With Matches

Illustration von Noran E.

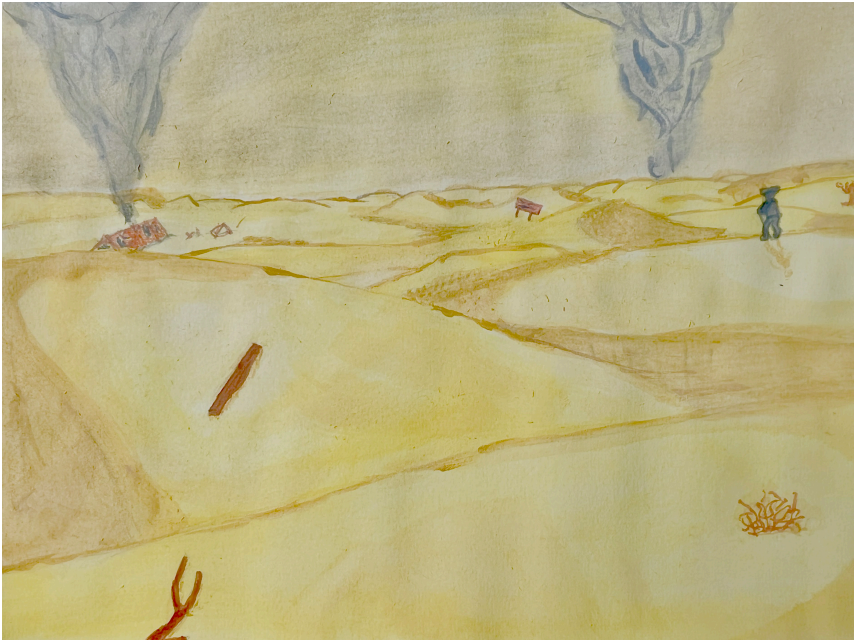
The match gave off a hissing sound as it was lit. The small flame flickered, danced from side to side, growing slightly as it consumed more and more of the wood. Then it fell. For a second the fire threatened to die, but when it hit the ground—the black liquid—in merely a second it grew twice the size of the kid with the matches and bigger. Its flames consumed everything, everyone, with a hunger that could never be stilled. Ama watched the child dance through flecks of golden light, shimmering through the green leaves far above. Their ginger locks flew from side to side, following the kid's movement. Their happy little laughter echoed through the forest, synchronised with the bird's song and the gurgle of the small stream. Ama loved to watch the children play and dance and dream. They were so young. They had their entire lives ahead of them. So much to see, so much to learn and to love. If Ama had known what would happen later that day, maybe they wouldn't have let the children play outside. Maybe they even would've packed their things and told the children they all were going for a long hike. But Ama didn't know, and so it all happened as it did. They smiled warmly as one of the older ones brought them a daisy chain. The child loved to make them. Every day, since the beginning of spring, it braided the little white flowers into crowns and gifted them to people from their commune. Whether it was one of the elders, one of the younger adults or one of the children, almost everyone was happy to receive such a present. Ama handled the flowers carefully, as they placed the fragile crown on their short hair. The child jumped happily and then ran off to play with its siblings. Ama smiled. This was paradise. Fleeing the cities had been the right decision. They could remember being taught in school how dangerous nature outside the city was. How mad you had to be to leave the safety and comfort of the cities. In truth, nature was all the pureness and beauty humankind had



sacrificed for profit and power. In truth, nature was life, drained by parasites. In truth, nature was much less dangerous than the cities. Grey places, filled with restless souls, and dreamless, hopeless workers. They wasted their lives chained to office chairs, barely earning enough to feed themselves let alone an entire family. Places where greed ruled over

rich and poor, over living and barely alive. Only the dead were out of reach. The Cities were places where the common purpose of razor blades wasn't to shave. The scars on Ama's body were the souvenir they took with them when they vanished in the woods. Wren, one of the oldest kids, always eager to contribute to the commune, walked past carrying arms full of sticks, ripping Ama from their thoughts. They greeted each other, and carried on with their days. Wren brought the sticks into the little hut where the commune gathered all the wood. It was going to be used for the campfire that evening. Everyone would sit around the warmth and tell stories, sing and laugh. On nights like these, the children were allowed to stay up late into the night and to dance underneath the stars. Wren had looked forward to the event for weeks. They jumped over an especially oily puddle. The surface reflected the sun in colourful rainbows. The black liquid was common in this area. Despite the rather large amount of oil in the nearby marshlands, it was used only on rare occasions and in small amounts to make their fires burn brighter. For the most part, people chose to leave it alone. It gave off a bad smell, and wasn't really needed. Wren kicked the wooden door open and let the sticks fall into a chaotic heap, knowing they were expected to stack them neatly. But they didn't, because they didn't want to. The kid left the mess behind and jumped out of the hut, whistling a tune only they knew. Then, they ran off into the woods again, jumping from stone to stone, imagining wild adventures and fighting swordfights with the sticks they were supposed to collect for tonight. They got carried away, fighting monsters and running through nature, and more time passed than they realised. With the amount of anticipation only a child could bring up, they made their way back to the little valley the commune lived in, picking up sticks hastily. Wren soon realised something was off. It was too quiet. They slowed down, taking in the strange atmosphere. The closer the kid came to the camp, the more they felt like something wasn't right. The urge to run back into the forest, to hide behind the trees was overwhelming, but Wren couldn't turn back now. So they walked on until they saw their worst fear confirmed. "No!" The word slipped from their lips as if they could change what had already happened. Wren stopped in their tracks, stumbled and fell to their knees. A bundle of sticks tumbled over the dirt. A single, hot teardrop fell to the soft ground, mixing with blood. The dark liquid formed puddles here and there under lifeless bodies. A crown of innocent white daisies left carelessly in the dirt. Ginger curls, scattered around their owner, mixing with dirt and blood. No word was spoken, no bird sang in that graveyard silence. Death itself thickened the air. Motionless, they sat at the last bedding of their siblings, wishing Wren had parted from this world with them. Just then they realised the presence of men in black uniforms, carrying heavy machines and pipes in a busy silence towards the marshlands. Hot, thick hate climbed up Wren's throat, made their vision blurry and tied their tongue. Their elders had taught them that hate was useless. It meant setting yourself on fire and hoping the world would burn with you. But it was too late now. Wren's soul already stood in flames, and their fingers gripped tightly to the box of matches.

Kira Bazilevskaia - Deep Within
Illustrationen von Jasper H. und Ronja S.



The world of the near future is in the midst of an environmental catastrophe. An anonymous narrator reflects on their life in a futuristic underground cell colony, as well as their personal relationship with a long-term partner. Affected by newfound struggles, the matter of survival becomes the part of the mundane.

It's the fifth collapse in the colony in past few months. A loud dull sound shakes the tight space of the cell, filling the air with a cloud of dust. You rush out of the kitchen, coughing and hiding your face in your palms, trying to reach out to me on the floor. I think there's sand in my hair. It's quiet again. Awfully quiet. A notification on my wristband finally lights up: several cells are under the rubble, some completely wiped out by the weight of the ground. I feel you trembling in my arms. Maybe I should say something soothing, something to make you feel safe or even hopeful, here under our kitchen table, but I have no such words left. My mouth feels dry, the ringing in my ears is nauseating. I say nothing, tightening my arms around your shoulders. "It's getting closer and closer and we both know it. It's just a matter of time when we find ourselves buried out here!" – I hear you screaming at the entrance. The evacuation center sent another pack of manuals and safety measures for our cell block, and they refuse to move us yet again. There are no spare cells available in the area and nobody seems to care enough to actually provide anything other than these stacks of documents. The contents are usually the same: something about keeping calm and looking after your close ones, managing the noise and movement in the household—a gentle way to abandon people and leave them to come in terms with their possible demise on their own. "How the hell do they expect us to act? 'Behave and maybe the walls won't crumble'—do they even hear themselves!?" —you frantically scroll through the pages— "All of these companies don't have the guts to say any of it to our faces. A bunch of stupid, soulless— Won't you say anything? They leave us to die and you're silent!? I can't, I just can't with you lately... with everything for that matter!" You give me a bitter yet desperate look again. And what could I say? You always knew the way with the words far better than I did. I remember us talking about our lives before we were forced down here. It was a calm evening at our kitchen table, we spent hours telling each

other all kinds of stories: picnics with friends, grandparents' farm in summer, cold breeze at the seaside in the early morning. So much has changed since then: in mere years the outside turned into a near lifeless wasteland, wild winds sweeping and covering everything in layers of dust and sand. We too changed. Despite providing basic necessities in harsh environment below the surface, the cell colonies proved to be unsuitable in long term and prone to collapses under the earth pressure, leaving people almost permanently trapped underground. Narrow tunnels connecting the system seem to be the only way of physical connection, but their weak construction leave the habitants rather hesitant to frequently use them unless necessary. Being stuck together for so long left me so... confused. I still love you; I want to believe you love me back, but we both know it isn't the way it was before. Isolation, lack of air and sunlight, these conditions have been so cruel to us. It's getting harder to stay gentle, hopeful. All of this pressure made us anxious, bitter, uncertain of what comes next, and I doubt any of us two was ready. But who would be in our place? I don't see an answer to this. The grocery delivery hasn't been coming for days. The nearest tunnel hasn't been properly restored yet; it seems the transport will be stopped for some time. Somebody will have to secure the food manually. The nearest storage cell is a solid 20-minute crawl through the colony paths, which has its own major risks. But when the options are dying of starvation or possibly getting buried under the rubble there's not much to consider. Despite your pleadings I decide to go alone this time, in worst case it will allow at least one of us two to survive. Living in tidy cells

sometimes makes you forget that you live underground, until you go out in the tunnels. It's always humid and dark, and the air circulation is much lower; if I didn't have an oxygen mask, I doubt I'd be able to make it far. And thus, I was moving through the tight space towards the destination, occasionally checking my location as I crawled further.



The soil under my feet and palms feels particularly loose this time. I try to be as careful as I can, moving slowly. I feel sweat trickling down my forehead. Should I have listened to you instead? Stayed in the comfort of our tiny cell for just a bit longer? I wonder if there's still a chance for us, despite all the odds in this godforsaken life. It's too late to think about it now. There is a growing trembling somewhere in the distance. I hold my breath.

Damian Clausen - Echoes Of The Verse

Illustrationen von Ewa B. Und Lilly T.

The neon skyline of Rhymora hummed in a haze of neon lights, casting a dreamlike glow over carbon streets pulsing beneath each footstep. The sky enriched with synthetic stars programmed to flicker in rhythmic patterns, created by the nearest black hole.

Everyone spoke in rhymes and verses, not as a choice but a consequence of neural chips streaming the only human art left: music. Conversations were a symphony of bars, metaphors twisting through metaphors. Yet, for all the clever wordplay, the meaning had faded.

“Yo, Sam - what’s good with you, kid? Feelin’ sick? Lookin’ slick? Or just another empty lid?”

Seventeen-year-old Neo barely glanced up from his holo-screen as his friend, K-Roc, approached. His words had the cadence of a freestyle, but Neo had learned long ago not to listen too closely. Nobody did anymore. Rhymes filled the air, built up, folded onto themselves and disappeared as soon as they were spoken.

“Nothin’ changes, man. Same old schemes. Just ghosts and dreams in these AI machines.”

Neo’s response, almost an automatic reflex rather than a thought. Empty words slid from his tongue like water, cold and fluid. He felt a flicker of something strange. It was awareness. The streets packed with people wandering through life without purpose. They didn’t notice the world around them - the feel of the lightweight but strong pavement, not nothing a baby crying 10 feet away or the taste of the chemically engineered air.

Neo stopped walking, leaving the tile beneath glowing, and stared at the over-head billboard. A holographic figure appeared: Lil Wayne, his image preserved by algorithms that had used his style and flow for centuries.

“Meta’s where the heart used to be, but now it’s all code - Living in a rhythm that we don’t even hold.”

Neo felt a chill run down his spine. He clenched his fists. This wasn’t just random nostalgia. It was a reminder of what had been lost.

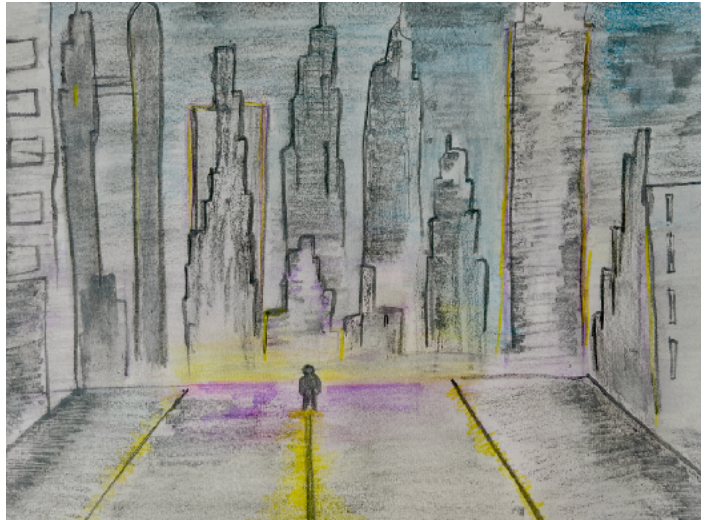
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The schoolyard buzzed with rhyming chatter, almost as if there were a melody enchanting the break time. Neo’s teacher, Mr. Zest, tapped on his tablet and launched into a lecture.

“Knowledge is a beat - steady, repeat. But the grooves get weak when the minds retreat.”

Neo slouched at his desk, staring at the ceiling. The synthetic sunlight filtered through glass with AI sensors monitoring emotional feedback. The bemas adapt to trigger a response, but nothing.

As the bass-heavy bell chimed and students continued their usual flow, Neo out last with his head low, drenched in his thoughts. K-Roc caught up to him.



"Yo, Neo, what's the deal with the stare? You out of bars? Lost in despair?"

Neo looked up abruptly. "Nah, just tired of the game. Words without meaning - just a flicker, a

flame."

K-Roc blinked, confusion clouding his eyes. He opened his mouth, but for a moment, no rhyme came. Neo had disrupted the rhythm.

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That night, Neo lay in his bed, staring at the ceiling, listening to the city mumble like a rapper like a rapper lost in his own verse. His mind raced through real memories - visions of people speaking with meaning and purpose to connect, not to rhyme. He remembered stories his grandmother told before her vocal chords had been modified by AI implants.

"Bars are a cage, and we've locked ourselves in. When words become noise, where does meaning begin?"

Something stirred up inside him - a spark of rebellion, possibly a truth waiting to be told. He sat up suddenly, pulling out a notebook from beneath his bed. Unlike the streams of lyrical flow generated by AI in his mind, these were his own words, written by hand.

A knock at the window. Zya, a girl from his block glanced at him with a similar spark behind her eyes.

"Neo," she whispered. "They're coming for us. Were the ones who remember, who think

for themselves.”

“Who? What?” Neo asked steadily but confused. “Who’s coming for us?”

“They call themselves ‘the Authority’ “. She answered. “They erase minds of those who question, rewrite the plot almost.”

Neo didn’t want to believe it, but what he had been feeling was too real to ignore. He had heard the myth about agents of AI seeking to maintain their superior intelligence. People who fought back were “recalibrated” until they had no more creativity or thoughts for themselves, fully dependent on artificial guides and ideas.

“How do we stop it?” Neo bravely replied.

Zya responded with a smirk on her face. Finally she had found another brave believer. “There’s a place in the Undercity - a network of poets who discovered the truth through old icons and their art. They have learnt to speak in raw words again, diving into real conversations, without constraint. They’ll teach us the old ways before our minds faint.”

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As Neo and Zya left for the Undercity, they weaved through a labyrinth of abandoned houses. The further they got the dimmer the Neon lights became.

They entered a building where voices clashed and unified without rhythm. A mumble growing loud and uncomfortable if you sat and listened for a minute. At the centre round-table sat an elder with her eyes closed, her voice a low murmur of prose.

“You’ve come seeking truth.” She said sharp. “Word once had power. But you’ve let them pass.”

Neo approached carefully. “Teach us,” he said quietly. “Show us how to feel again.”

“It begins with silence,” she said. “And it ends with choice. Let meaning guide you - not rhythm. Let purpose be your voice.”

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In the heart of a future where words had become empty echoes, Neo found his voice - not a stream of rhymes, but as a truth that beat within his soul. The world might speak in rhyme, but he would speak for something real.

And that was how the revolution began - not with a roar but with a whisper.

Lisa Rensch - The Spy

Illustration von Eva D.



The police station is old. Windows built too thin to withstand a two-week rainstorm. These windows stir faint memories from the past—when time was not just a concept to wait out, when one would admire the streets and trees outside. But today there was none of that. Today, the window in a dark room can barely hold the enormous force of the water hammering against the trembling glass like angry fists pounding. Occasionally, the soaked wooden frame releases water drops to the cold floor. Three hundred and forty-two plopping sounds since I've been here.

With another *plop*, a police officer enters. Taking a seat, he proceeds to gather himself, swiping through a tablet intently and carefully sipping his hot coffee.

Eventually bored eyes dart up at me. *Plop*.

"You are the only suspect for a crime committed yesterday evening, on a closed railroad station," he states, staring at me expectantly.

But he is met with no reaction from me. After all the trouble, I could not bear giving him the satisfaction of making his job easier.

Plop.

Letting out a deep, exhausted sigh, he declares, "Okay, well then. Let's get this over with. Security caught you jumping from train to train, singing, dancing—" He starts rattling off, spinning his pen without a care in the world.

My hands grip the table, and I interrupt, "There's still enough joy in the world to dance and sing. You can't take that from us."

Suddenly, the pen stops spinning. He leans forward and his expression tightens, eyebrows furrowed in confusion.

To my surprise, he throws his head back and laughs. Cold laughter echoes unnervingly, making him shake like the trees outside in the wind.

Confusion and anger must be written all over my face.

"You think that is the crime you are accused of—dancing and singing? You must think you're so special, so original, so rebellious." He chuckles, leans back, and folds his hands behind his neck. "No one cares about forbidden dancing or singing anymore. Our dear leader is not going to be angry about that."

That threw me off guard. Wasn't he, as an officer, supposed to be one of the most loyal forces to our dear leader?

Gathering myself, I shot back, "It's still setting a sign! He can't forbid us anything!"

He looks at me with amusement. "You wish!" he spits, chuckling. "Your little adventure is only going to get you a fine for trespassing and vandalising trains—by smashing their doors and windows and scribbling meaningless quotes on the walls."

My knuckles, gripping the table, turn white, and I am on the edge of raising my voice.

He hesitates. "And discovering the hiding place of the climate restoration money we taxed you guys for, from a few years ago."

The storm intensifies, darkening the room. The water drops quicken. *Plop, plop, plop.*

That night's memories are a blur of anger and loneliness.

"I didn't take or find any money," I say calmly. "Wait, that money was not spent?" I ask accusingly, my voice cracking. This is why the heavy rainstorms have not stopped yet.

"Obviously not," he pushes. "The climate restoration campaign is just a myth. It's too late. The temperatures can't be lowered anymore."

Sipping his coffee, he gives me time to process this revelation.

"But why would they hide this confidential knowledge in an old train?"

"I guess interest in trains has died."

I am not laughing at that.

"It's become the loneliest place around here. No one has entered the old railroad station in more than seven years. Except for you."

Something is very wrong here. My curiosity sparks. "Why?"

He rolls his eyes. "Why what?"

"Why tell me this? I'll expose it when I'm out."

An unsettling smirk splits his face.

He starts to laugh. "You're sitting here, thinking your actions mean something. But you're not even close to being dangerous enough to lock up. We have something more efficient prepared. Your execution date is in three days at 7:34 p.m."

Now the water drops feel like a ticking bomb. *Plop.*

Time may still be a concept, but there is nothing left to wait for. *Plop.*

My attempts to protest against our dear leader won't ever pay off. *Plop.*

The officer is right. I'm not special. I moved nothing. The only thing achieved were meaningless fines. My actions are meaningless.

Plop.

However, something did not add up. The storm was loud enough to overpower voices, so I had to raise mine. "Why did you tell me all this, if you are going to kill me anyway?"

"I share your motivations to despise our leader."

"Then why do you even work for him?" I throw my arms up in frustration.

No answer. We stare at each other.

"I think we need fresh air." He picks up his still steaming coffee. "And I need a new coffee."

Abruptly he pushes back his chair and makes his way over to the window. He starts turning the handle. "We are on the ground floor, by the way," he adds casually.

Then the window opens, and the plopping sounds are gone. The storm fills the room, loud like a howling wolf, water on all surfaces. Squinting against wind and wetness, the police officer crosses the room, rips open the door, and the wind slams it shut behind him. The lock clicks.

Desislava Georgieva - Connorlando

Illustrationen von Yuki P. und David N.



With an odd feeling, I wake up to my walls glowing orange—a colour so vivid it feels surreal. All disoriented, I stumble outside. There, I find this new world that is nowhere near home.

High, humongous skyscrapers, their windows damp and covered in a thin layer of moisture from the heavy, humid air. Through the foggy atmosphere, I spot that alarming orange colour again—it's the flag of Connorlando.

I am severely confused. Am I dreaming? I pinch myself. Nothing. What is Connorlando and how did I end up here?

With a mix of hesitation and desperation, I approach a smiling woman, sitting on her orange bike, eating her sandwich from her yellow lunchbox.

"Excuse me? What day is it?" I kindly ask.

"Wow, you must've woken up right now and ran out of the house... Poor you, still in your PJ's, all exhausted!" she says, smirking as she chews her sandwich. "It's the 25th Conntober, a Conday, and it's exactly 11:36 a.m."

"It's October already?"

"Oh no, you DIDN'T... It's CONNTOBER! Shame on you!"

"Sorry, what?"

"How ridiculous... It's his birthmonth and soon birthday..." the woman shouts.

"Whose birthday?" I interrupt, slowly taking a step back.

"NOW I am MAD... Our Majesty Connor III... Seriously, embarrassing... You are a disgrace to our nation, not appreciating what our SAVIOR went through to keep US and the LAND alive. I better go now or they'll catch me too..." she says, quickly riding off.

"Catch me too?" "Majesty Connor?" I whisper to myself. Who is that? I must find out! So I run "home" to find out what this all is about.

After a few minutes, I come across a website. According to *Connorpedia* (strange name for a website, I wasn't even sure if it was trustworthy), Connorlando is an independent nation, twice the size of the US, with a population of approximately 300 million "Connorians." The official language is English, though they have their own dialect. Yes, that's true. Thankfully, the lady I spoke to didn't speak "Connorian," but from what I've overheard in conversations, I did NOT understand a single thing—it feels like they're talking in cursive.

The current President of Connorlando is Connor III, and now everything else makes sense... “Conntober,” “Conday,” the flags of Connorlando everywhere, everyone acting the same—smiling, their lingo, everyone riding bikes, even their hairstyles identical. And everyone praising him, Connor III.

This form of dictatorship is truly horrifying. I won’t lie—this might be the modern equivalent of North Korea. The policies, which dictate that you must live a Connor III-approved life and defend the government, mean you can’t have any opinion other than what the leaders want you to have. To me, this is hard to believe, especially considering the world we have created—a world that strives for openness, acceptance, and equality. I don’t know how we, as a society, ended up here, with the government taking control and us unable to prevent it.

Another interesting fact about Connorlando—BOOM!

A deafening explosion shakes the ground. My chair tips over and I hit the floor hard. Outside, distant screams echo through the streets. “THEY’RE HERE!” “THEY ARE COMING TO GET US!” I rush to the window. I spot soldiers—actually, the whole army. Their uniforms buttoned to the top, everyone armed, marching through the chaos.

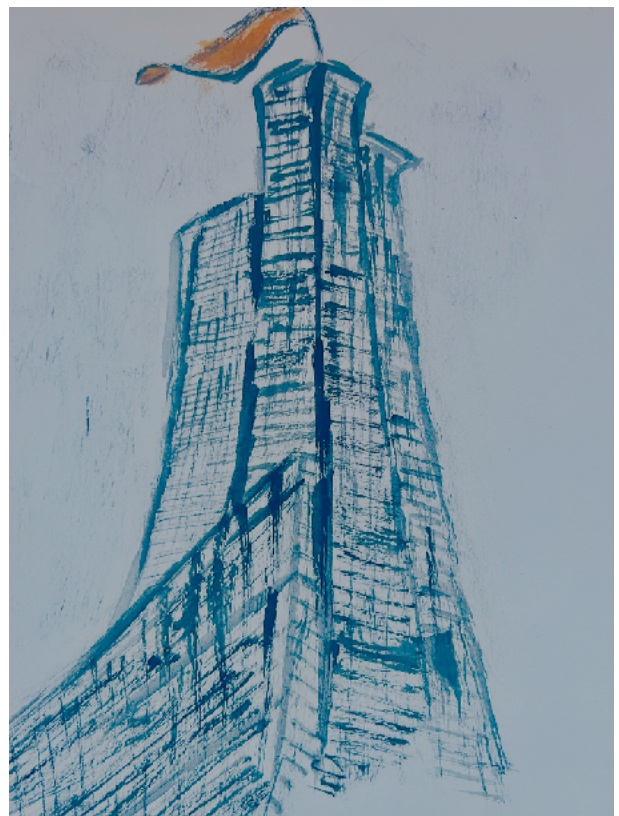
I lurch away from the window, my legs shaking. I don’t know what to do. There’s so much going through my head right now. Desperate for answers, I grab the remote and turn on the TV.

“This is an emergency broadcast. Earlier today, our nemesis nation, Maxhausen, launched a surprise attack, leaving Connorlando in a state of crisis with major damage to urban areas. Reports confirm the use of advanced weaponry, including the bomb which met the country’s city centre. Connor III has declared a national crisis, and all citizens are urged to remain calm and follow official instructions.”

My heart is racing. A war?

“This act of aggression against our great nation is unacceptable. Majesty Connor III assures us that Connorlando will stand strong against this cowardly assault. All residents are expected to shelter in place and follow orders. Escape is not an option—I repeat, **ESCAPE IS NOT AN OPTION**. The borders are sealed, and anyone attempting to flee will be detained. Loyalty to Connorlando is loyalty to survival.”

Someone wake me up from this dream, please. This can’t be real. I’m trapped in a nation I don’t belong to, in the middle of a war I don’t understand. I’ll never get out of here.



Namid Wiehler - A Drowned World

Illustrationen von Fiona T. und Franziska K.



The year was 2200, and Earth had been swallowed by the seas. The last remnants of humanity clung to survival on artificial islands, floating fortresses cobbled together from scraps of old cities and ships. Communication between these scattered havens had all but ceased since the satellites fell from the sky. Big storms hit these islands continually. While fighting them, many had

already lost their lives. Humanity was all about survival. No matter if you were alone or in groups, surviving these storms was your biggest mission. Jason stood on the edge of his island, staring at the endless, moving waves. The metal deck beneath him was warm from the sun, but the cold wind bit at his skin. Somewhere out there had to be his sister, Nala. He hadn't seen her since the day of the big storm two years ago. Back then, they had to separate, and she left the island to live somewhere else. Since there was little to no way of communication left, he hadn't heard from her since.

Behind him, Jonas's voice cut through the wind. "You gonna help, or just stand over there?" Jason turned, shaking himself from his thoughts. Jonas, his best friend and the closest thing to family he had now, was deep in the guts of their island's water filtration system. It hadn't been working properly for the past few days.

"Can't fix it alone?" Jason asked, forcing a smirk as he stepped over.

"Not unless you've got magic hands I don't know about," Jonas shot back, handing him a wrench. "This thing's dead. Filters are clogged, the pump's fried. We're down to what's in the tanks."

Jason sighed. "How much time do we have?"

Jonas hesitated, then muttered, "A week, maybe two. After that... we're done."

Jason stared at the broken machinery, then out at the ocean again. "We need to get resources from another island. There has to be one left that isn't too far away."

Jonas stood, wiping his hands on his pants. "You serious? Such a trip will take days, maybe weeks. Is this about finding your sister again? Listen, I understand you miss her and want to

find her, but we already searched the nearby islands and every single one was destroyed by the storm back then. Did you also consider the possibility she might not have made it out alive—”

“Don’t say that! She was the most skilled person I’ve ever met,” Jason interrupted. “She’s my sister. I need to find her, and if she’s out there, she’ll definitely be able to help us.”

Jonas shook his head. “Where do you want to look, though? We searched every inch in reach: the east, the south, and the west. And you know it’s not possible for us to go north. The storms up there are even too much for us.”

Jason frowned. “I told you I wanted to try and find her again for half a year now, and you always turn me down. And what choice do we have? Go south and take a month to come back with resources, when everyone’s already dead of thirst?”

This time, Jonas didn’t fight back. “Okay,” he said, nodding. “But if we die out there, I’m going to be so mad at you.”

Jonas went to get his boat while Jason wrote a letter for Jamal, the “leader” of their island, who organized the distribution of work on their island.

The boat was small, barely seaworthy, but it was all they had. The sky was overcast as Jason and Jonas loaded supplies: an old blanket, a week’s worth of food, a fishing rod, and a knife, in case they met some unfriendly people out there. Jason checked the compass strapped to his wrist one last time before starting the motor.

“You sure about this?” Jonas asked, his tone unusually serious.

“No,” Jason admitted. “But I need to find my sister, and we have to help our island. I have to try.”

Jonas nodded, and they set off, the roar of the motor breaking the heavy silence.

The first day at sea was uneventful. Jason took the helm while Jonas slept in the cramped space at the bow. They passed uncivilized islands, rusted cars, shattered skyscrapers sticking out of the water. The ocean seemed to stretch forever, swallowing everything. By the second day, the waves grew restless. Gray clouds rolled overhead, and the wind picked up. Jonas took over steering while Jason scanned the horizon for any sign of an island.

“This is bad,” Jonas muttered. “Storm’s coming.”

Jason squinted at the darkening sky. “We’ll make it. We have to.”

Suddenly, the clouds pulled together, and gigantic hail started dropping from the sky. The waves began splashing around them.

“I can’t control the boat!” Jonas screamed. Jason ran to him and tried to support, but nothing was working. The hail was hurting their skin, and waves covered them with water.

“Look over there!” Jonas shouted, pointing at a gigantic boat coming towards them. The boat looked different, something they had never seen, something new. A see-through cover was protecting the people on it, while a woman was standing at the front, pointing at them as well.

“Was it? No.” Jason thought. “No way, that’s my sister.” Jonas grabbed his shoulder, screaming, “Behind us!”

The biggest wave they had ever seen was coming towards them. Jason started shaking and turned around. The boat was gone.

"The boat! Where is it?" he asked Jonas, panicking.

"No way it's gone," Jonas responded.

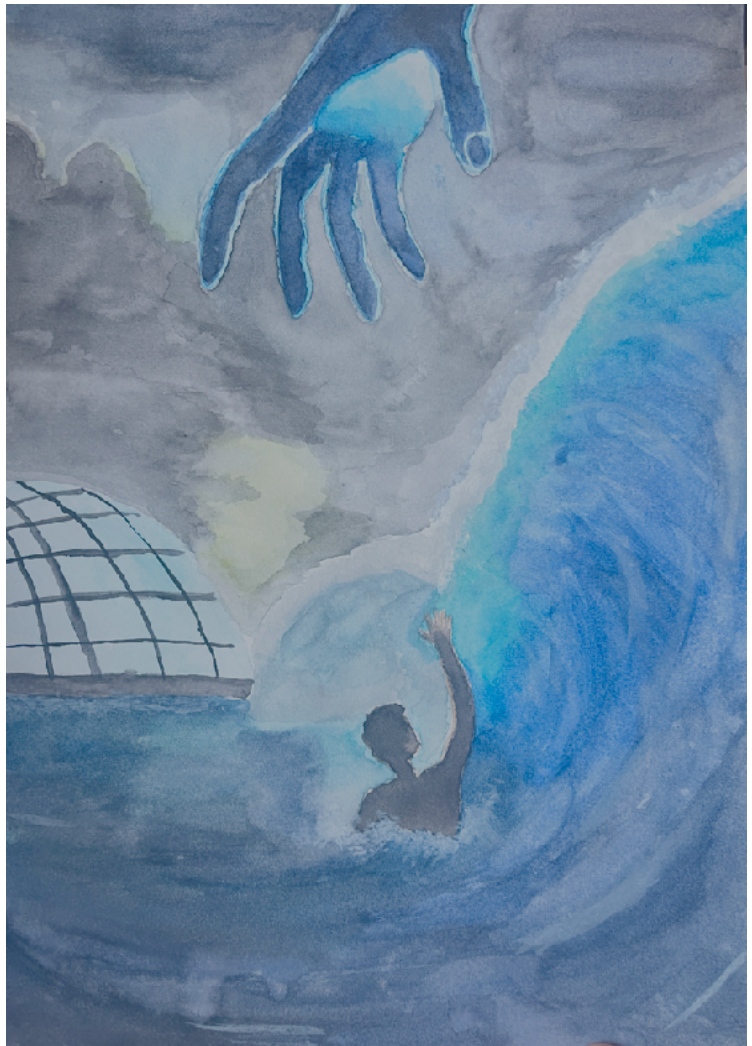
"We can't do anything," Jason said.

"I guess so," Jonas answered, tears rolling down his eyes. They hugged each other one last time, accepting their fate—the fate most humans had to face these days.

"I'm sorry," Jason stuttered.

The tsunami was about to hit them. They closed their eyes and waited.

Suddenly, something pulled them into the water. Jason held his breath, but he could breathe. He was falling and landed on something soft. He looked around, and a hand was trying to help him up. But whose hand was it? "No way it was..."



Delila Masch - The Wall of Secrets

Illustrationen von Ella N. und Minda K.

In a world long after our time, flying cars or new instructions to help us human beings never existed. Times did change drastically and treated human equally lost its value.

The world is divided into rich and poor, unprivileged and privileged, day and night class. Social coherence outside of one's own classes does not exist, the humanity is strictly divided. The people of the day class, also known as the poor workers, have no names, they are numbered, at least that is what it says on their ID cards. Number 1019, a boy just 16 years old, is part of the day class. He hasn't been going to school since he was 12 years old. From then on he had to sign up as a worker, just like every member of the day class from that age onwards. The day class were divided into different working areas, some harvested food, some worked in factories, some had to serve the rich. As long as the sun was shining they were able to live their life as they wanted to, at least the short amount of time they had left excluding working, but they were forbidden to leave the house at night. None of them ever saw the night sky. None of them were allowed to walk in the streets after midnight. Number 1019, actually called Ben by his parents, had always been more rebellious than other young people. Already at school he did not accept the class division and was therefore expelled from school by starting a riot. He didn't understand why the night class were allowed to go outside at night and live in privilege, while his parents toiled every day and never received any advantages. No matter which poster Ben looked at on the city streets, they warned everyone: "We can only offer you safety if you follow the rules!" Most of them implemented this, some who left the house at night never appeared again, but no one seemed to be trying to resolve the law, most were probably just afraid of never seeing friends and family again, like the others who disappeared. One day just before nightfall, on Ben's way home, he saw a group of members of the day class with leaflets. They whispered: "We'll meet at the town hall square tonight at midnight." and then they moved on. They gave Ben a leaflet: "The government is lying to us. They offer us no security, they brutally imprison us. We will change this tonight!"



Ben was unsure. Should he risk disappearing like so many other residents? On the other hand, his curiosity plagued him and his anger towards the government grew ever greater. Ben decided to join the rebellion at night, just before midnight. He snuck out the window while his parents were sleeping, afraid of being discovered. He rushed to the town hall square and arrived on time.

However, he didn't see anyone. Perhaps

this was just a pretext by the government to see who would want to resist? He looked around for a few minutes until someone called out to him: "Are you here to join the rebellion?" "Yes", Ben whispered. The stranger pulled him into a side street. He met several people of different ages. They all came to band together against the government and find out what they were hiding.

They ran for several minutes to the city limits. While they were hiding, they saw a group of tanks patrolling a high wall. They had never seen this wall before. It was set up every night to hide the government's secret. The group was close to its goal: finding out what the government was keeping secret.

Camouflaged with dark clothing and hoods, they ran after the group leaders. Only they knew how to get behind the wall. When they finally arrived, each of them made their way through a gap in the wall. They were shocked when they saw what was on the other side. However, they had to move away from the wall undercover and ran a little further until they got behind a barrack, the area of which was not lit. They looked through a window and saw missing day class members working hard in inhumane conditions. In this house they ran the textile industry and produced expensive clothing brands such as Gucci, Versace and Louis Vuitton. None of the workers had any hope of ever being able to return from the barracks to their old lives. The workers looked emaciated, they were wearing old, shabby clothes and there were soldiers patrolling around them who beat them with sticks when taking a short break. The group continued walking past all the barracks until they finally came to a beautiful, magnificent building. A kind of castle. Through windows, hidden by the darkness, they saw the rich, the so-called night class. They lived in a trance and wore the expensive clothes that the group had previously seen the day class producing. They finally understood the concept, the government was just waiting for the day-class people to resist and leave the house at night so that they could finally be moved to the barracks and made to work for the rich. In the barracks, the day class had to work harder and harder for the night class than the group could ever have imagined. It was a labor camp. But suddenly they heard someone yelling: "What are you doing? Go back to your barracks!" They started running towards the wall until they were finally caught. What happened to them from then on remained hidden forever, but they never returned and Ben's parents never saw him again.



Jasmin Hochgräf - Escape From Virtual Reality

Illustrationen von Ema D. und Henriette W.

The bright screen flickered in front of Tom's eyes as he came out of the virtual world. A dull ache throbbed in his head. Just like every time after the permanent simulation. Tom blinked several times to get used to the light in his small apartment. People had been living in the virtual world for many years. The real one had become a dark and dangerous place during this time. In virtual reality, each individual pursued their dream life. You were free from all worries and fears. The time away from reality was full of joy and happiness, while in the real world you were lonely and isolated and deprived of all social interaction. Tom also felt this increasingly over the last few weeks. Not only did his physical complaints increase, he also felt feelings of loneliness more and more clearly. The virtual world seemed increasingly inadequate and meaningless to him. His only social contact was his online friend Emely. The two of them had gotten to know each other better online over the past few years and had become good friends. He wrote to her with trembling hands: "I can't take it anymore. I have to get out of here."

After a few minutes of waiting, Emely finally responded: "Are you crazy? You can't go out there Tom, you know everyone always says how dangerous it is out there!" But Tom ignored her and her warning. He had been working on a new program for months to be able to switch off his surveillance cameras and break out of his apartment.

That night he would give it a try and go out into the real world. When the time finally came and it got dark outside, Tom slipped out of the apartment.

He was nervous and wondered whether he should really venture out. In order to escape from his apartment building, he still had to get through the lower exit. To do this, he used his newly developed program again. The door opened quietly without making any noise and Tom was able to escape into the outside world. New and overwhelming smells hit him as he walked down the deserted streets of the city. All the dirt on the streets was conspicuous. Huge, powerful-looking buildings surrounded him.

Tom felt a little intimidated by the new impressions and his newfound freedom. But this positive feeling was not to last long. He heard a shrill alarm signal. Startled, he turned around. Panic gripped Tom. Without a plan, he ran off. Further down the street into nowhere. As he turned a corner, he collided with someone. Startled, he jerked back and looked into the face of a young woman. She smiled at him. "Quick, this way!" she hissed at him and led him further along the streets. They were still being followed by the loud alarm signal. The nameless woman stopped at a hidden passageway and led Tom into it. She led him through a labyrinthine underground until they finally arrived at a hidden shelter. They encountered a group of other dropouts who had escaped into reality. The young woman turned to him. "Welcome to the real world," the woman greeted Tom with a smile. "Hi, I'm glad you saved me out there. My name is Tom and what's your name?" "My name is Emely, it is possible that we

know each other from the virtual world?" Emely replied. He looked at her in surprise. Apparently his only friend was real.

Over the next few weeks, Tom learned the harsh reality of survival. Nevertheless, he felt fully alive again for the first time in a long time. During this time, he got to know the dropouts better and was also able to deepen his relationship with Emely. Their goal was to fight together against the current world and to ensure a better future. They wanted people to be in harmony with nature again.

The group lived off a few supplies and what they could find in the abandoned cities. Each of them also had their own individual task. Some of the group were responsible for growing food in small hidden houses. Others repaired old technology. Tom learned during this time that he seemed to have a great talent for hacking old computer systems. As a result, he began working on a program that would allow them to connect with other resistance groups. They wanted to find more reach for their target. However, the secret work did not go unnoticed. One night, Tom was woken up by Emely. She looked and sounded nervous. "Hurry, we have to get out of here urgently! The drones have found our location. If we don't escape now, all our hard work will have been for nothing." They both looked at each other in panic. They began to run. Through the underground tunnels to an inconspicuous exit. At the same moment, they noticed the sounds of the drones getting louder and louder. They both knew what that meant. The drones were getting closer. They ran on and looked for another exit. When Tom and Emely reached it, they quickly went out and stood frozen. The sky was full of dangerous-looking drones. They scanned the ground below them with their red eyes. "This way," Emely shouted, pointing to an abandoned subway shaft. They hurried off.

On the way to the station, they stumbled over every possible piece of scrap and rubble scattered on the ground. Jumping underground, Tom landed awkwardly and felt a sharp pain in one of his ankles. Emely came to his aid and gasped, "Come on, we have to keep going." They frantically scrambled through the ground. After what felt like endless hours, Tom and Emely reached a new shelter, completely exhausted. They found themselves in an old and dilapidated bunker. It was located deep underground. There were already other resistance fighters on site.

In the following weeks, everyone in the group continued to build up their work. During this time, Tom and other hackers also developed a security system to warn them of further attacks by drones. Tom also worked desperately to expand his communication program. This was to be the key to networking the resistance. His new friends and Emely supported him as much as they could. With their help, Tom succeeded weeks after the attack. "It's working!" he shouted excitedly as he walked towards the others. Emely looked up in surprise. "Really? We can finally communicate with other groups from other hiding places." This information reached the other hiding places within a few days. For the first time since the groups started organizing, there was hope. You could clearly feel the tension of the last few weeks falling away from all the members. Now they could finally concentrate on drawing up a precise plan to overthrow the system.

But the joy didn't last long enough. The security system alarm went off. "They've found us," someone shouted anxiously. From above them came the familiar sound of drones. It seemed that the government had decided to put an end to the groups' resistance once and for all. Emely and Tom looked at each other with determination. They both had the same certainty. "We will not give up! Never!" Tom whispered to Emely. He was saying what they were both thinking. They hastily packed up their things. Only the bare essentials, understandably. Tom backed up the data from his program on a small, inconspicuous device. It was their only hope of keeping the resistance alive and having a chance of freedom. As they both left the bunker, they could already see the silhouettes of the drones in the distance. They were approaching them faster and faster. Their battle had only just begun. Tom was still certain, however, that he had chosen the only right path. Living in the real world, with all its dangers, was better than an empty existence in the virtual world. Together with Emely, he ran down into the



streets, already facing the future.

They ran through the rubble of the deserted city, the sounds of drones in the background. They stopped at a collapsed building and hid in the ruins. "What should we do now?" Tom asked desperately. Emely pulled an old map out of her pocket. "There's an old shelter that could get us out of the city. If we can make it there, we should be

safe for now." Together they waited until the sounds of the drones passed. Then they crept on slowly. The light was sparse and they could make out the lights of other people on the horizon. They were probably other resistance fighters. However, they didn't have time to take a closer look.

The sun was already rising again when they finally reached the shelter. Because it was almost completely filled in, it was difficult to squeeze through a small opening. It was dark inside. Emely took a flashlight out of her bag and switched it on. They walked ahead. Suddenly they heard voices. Emely hurriedly switched off the flashlight. "They must have gone this way," a strange voice was heard saying. "Government troops," Emely whispered quietly to Tom. They pressed themselves against the walls and tried to be as quiet as possible. Footsteps came closer. They both breathed in and out shakily. After a few seconds, the footsteps moved away again. Tom and Emely waited a few more minutes before they continued walking quietly and slowly. He could feel himself getting more and more tired. His whole body ached and he

hadn't drunk for hours. After what felt like an eternity, they saw a faint light a little further on. They had found the exit. They cautiously stepped out of the darkness. They were in a forest away from the city and people. "We've made it," said Emely, happy and exhausted at the same time. Tom nodded in disbelief. They looked at each other. "That was just the beginning. We have to find the other groups." They set off again. This time in search of other people who were working with them.

For days they walked through the forest, feeding on whatever they could find and the last of the provisions Tom had packed. Tom had switched on his communication device, but there was no feedback from others in their group. Either they were too far apart or they didn't dare to send them anything. On the fourth night they spent in the forest, they were woken by a strange noise. It sounded like the humming of a machine.

However, it was also different from anything they were familiar with. Slowly and attentively, they crept in the direction of the sound. When they reached a small clearing in the woods, they noticed something strange. A small object barely bigger than a car was hovering quietly above the ground. Next to it stood several people in conspicuous clothing. "What and who is that?" Tom whispered to Emely. But she just shook her head. "I have no idea. They're definitely not from the government." Suddenly, one of the men turned to them. "Come out," he shouted into the forest. "We know you're here."

Tom and Emely looked at each other, startled. What should they do? Run away or face the people. "We're friends of yours, don't worry," another of them called out. "We're part of the resistance. I promise!" they came in their direction. Each of them had a helmet on, which they now took off. There were also women among them. One approached them. "Hi, I'm Maya," she said. "My group has received

your signal and has come to rescue both of you." Emely and Tom stared at Tom's device in disbelief. He had actually done it. "How... how can that be?" he asked, confused. Maya answered him: "There's a lot you don't know yet. Come with us, we'll show you." The two looked at each other.

This was all they had hoped for in the last few days. They looked at each other determinedly and walked towards Maya. Together

they climbed into the flying object and flew off. An uncertain but now hopeful future lay ahead of them. The revolution could begin.



Paul Willbrandt - Diary Entry

Illustrationen von Conrad M. und Tom R.

E42's Diary Entry

Date: Year 112, Cycle 84, Day 9

Time: 22:47 Bunker Standard Time

This morning started like most mornings do when E78 is around: her challenging the system and me trying to convince her to stop. I was looking at data from yesterday's mission when she came in, leaning on my desk like she always does.

"Did you know humans used to have names?" she said, her voice full of excitement, like always when she talks about forbidden things.

I kept on looking at my screen. "What are you even talking about?"

"Names," she said again. "Not numbers like nowadays. Actual names. They picked them themselves. And jobs too! No supervisors assigning them. They just chose."

I slightly looked at her, shaking my head. "That doesn't sound very realistic. People choosing their own jobs? What if they picked something they weren't even good at? That would ruin everything."

"That's point,"



t h e
s h e

answered dangerously excited. "It wasn't about efficiency. It was about having the free choice. It didn't have to be efficient."

"That's absurd," I said, turning back to my work. "The system calculates what's best for everyone. It's why we're still alive. Without the supervisors, humanity wouldn't have survived a single cycle after the war."

She crossed her arms. "And what kind of life is this, E42? Living to survive and nothing else? Don't you ever wonder what it was like—before all this?"

"No," I said. "I don't. And you shouldn't either. It's dangerous."

She leaned in closer, lowering her voice. "What's the point of surviving if we don't even know what we've lost?"

I didn't know how to answer that, so I didn't. I just told her, like I always do, to cut it out before the supervisors noticed. She rolled her eyes and left, but her words kept stuck in my head for the whole day.

The rest of the day was normal. Well, as normal as life gets in the bunker. I prepared for my next surface mission while E78 worked her shift in bunker mechanics.

By the evening, I was in my room making further plans for tomorrow, when the alarms turned on. A Violation. Someone had opened the hatch to the surface without being authorised to do so.

I grabbed my safety equipment and ran. When I got to the hatch, the supervisors were already there, their robotic, metal bodies blocking making it hard to get through. Through the glass, I saw her. E78. She was on the surface, wearing a protective suit, she only could have stolen, walking like she didn't even see the supervisors freaking out in their own cold, creepy way.

I couldn't believe it. "E78, what are you doing?!" I yelled into the communication system, my voice shaking.

I heard her voice softly through the speakers. "I had to see it, E42. I had to know if there's anything left."

I froze in for a second, unsure what to do. I should've alerted the supervisors, but I couldn't. Instead, I suited up and went after her.

The surface was the same as always: dead, empty, and heavily radiated. The sky was black of ashes. But she kept walking, like she was looking for something.

When I caught up to her, she was just standing, staring at something. I followed her gaze, and for the first time, I saw it too.

A patch of green. Just a few weeds, barely alive, but real. And above it, a glance of a blue sky coming threw the thick black clouds.

"It's beautiful," she whispered, her voice filled with something I couldn't quite understand at that time.

Before I could say anything, a shadow emerged over us. I turned and saw a supervisor. It had followed us, silent and efficient as always.

Its voice was cold, mechanical. "Unauthorized person on the surface. Punishment: execution."

I stepped in front of her. "No! Wait! She didn't-"

The supervisor pushed me aside like I weighed nothing. My body just hit the ground as it grabbed its weapon.

E78 didn't run. She just stood there, looking at me. And then she smiled.

"Even though death is coming to get me," she said, her voice calm, "I've never felt more free than I do right now. People must've been incredibly stupid to destroy this—living this freedom every day."

The shot came before I could even get on my feet again. One bullet and all life left her body.

I carried her back to the hatch, her body in my arms and my mind a mess of thoughts.

The supervisors didn't stop me. They didn't even notice me. To them, the situation was over, the problem solved.

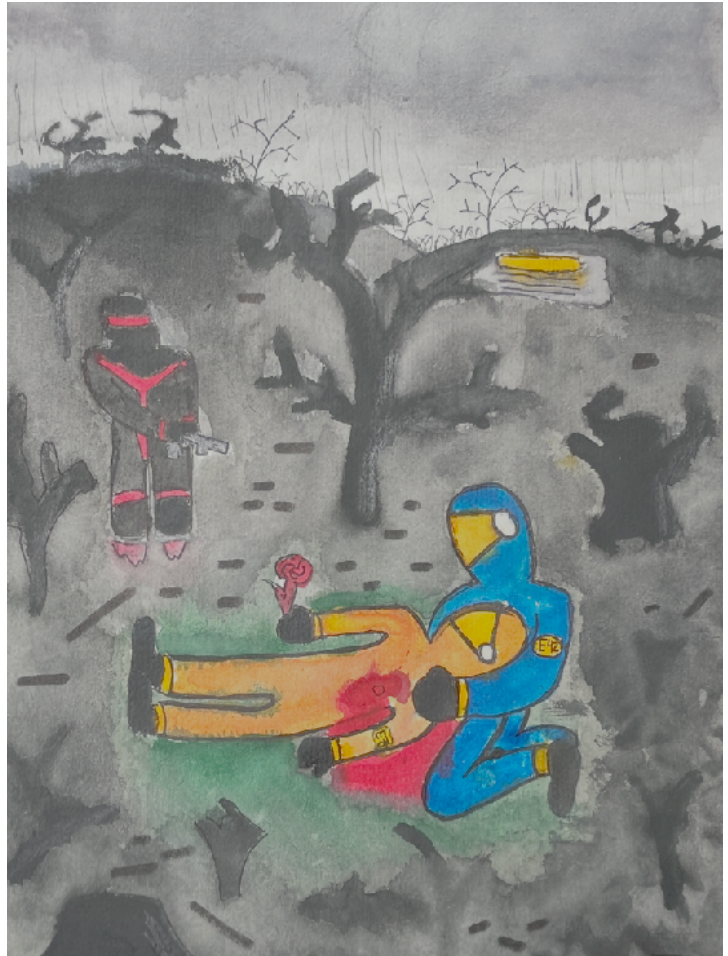
When I got her back inside, I laid her down and took off her helmet. Her face was extremely white, but that smile was still there.

I sat beside her for a long time, thinking about what she'd said. About the weeds and the sky as well as about freedom. And for the first time in my life, I realized the system had taken something from me too. It had taken her. It had taken the one person who made me question anything, the one thing I never wanted to lose.

And then I smiled.

I smiled and understood more than I'd ever understood anything before.

End of Entry.



Rehan Ahmed - Timefall

Illustrationen von Jonah P. Und Milan S.

"What? Where am I?" Ronan shouted, his voice echoing through the bleak streets. "I was just in my garage, finally making a breakthrough on my project. But where is this place, and why does it look like my neighborhood, but run down?"

"STOP RIGHT THERE! DON'T YOU DARE MOVE; ANOTHER INCH AND YOU'LL SEE YOUR GUTS LYING AROUND!" a voice hollered from behind him.

Ronan froze, his heart racing whilst being puzzled. He turned slowly to see a figure emerging from the shadows with a gun aimed directly at his cranium. The rebel's eyes were hard and pertinacious.

"Who are you?" the rebel demanded.

"I... I'm Ronan. I don't know what's going on," Ronan stuttered, confusion and fear in his eyes.

The rebel's expression hardened.

"Ronan? The Ronan? Fuck, after 100 years on the dot."

Before Ronan could respond, another figure emerged from the shadows. It was Reed, the rebel leader. Without warning, Reed punched Ronan square in the jaw, sending him sprawling to the ground.

"Do you have any idea what the fuck you've done?" Reed shouted, his voice filled with rage. Ronan looked up, dazed and bewildered. "What are you talking about? I don't understand," he implored.

Reed's eyes ignited with fury. "Your project! Your damn fucking project caused all of this!"

Reed composed himself, then extended a hand to help Ronan up. "Come on, we need to get back to our lair. We don't have much time."

Ronan, still hesitant from the punch and the revelation, took Reed's outstretched hand and got to his feet.

As they made their way through a dark, gloomy, narrow tunnel, alarms suddenly bellowed, echoing off the walls. Ronan's heart grew weary and shaky. "What's that?" he asked, his voice barely audible over the noise.

An explosion rumbled in the distance, shaking the ground beneath their feet. Reed cursed under his breath. "Damn the fucking IBM. They must have detected the gravity spike from your arrival. We need to move, now!"

Together, they hastened through the tunnel, the sounds of chaos growing louder behind them. As they neared the rebel lair, Reed finally let out his words.



"Listen, Ronan. This isn't just about going back in time. Time travel here isn't linear; it's branched. There are different timelines, and your DNA started it all. If the father of time travel makes it so that this all never happened, even time will bow down to you. Only the spark that lit this flame will be the only one to stop it all. We need you. Are you up for the task?"

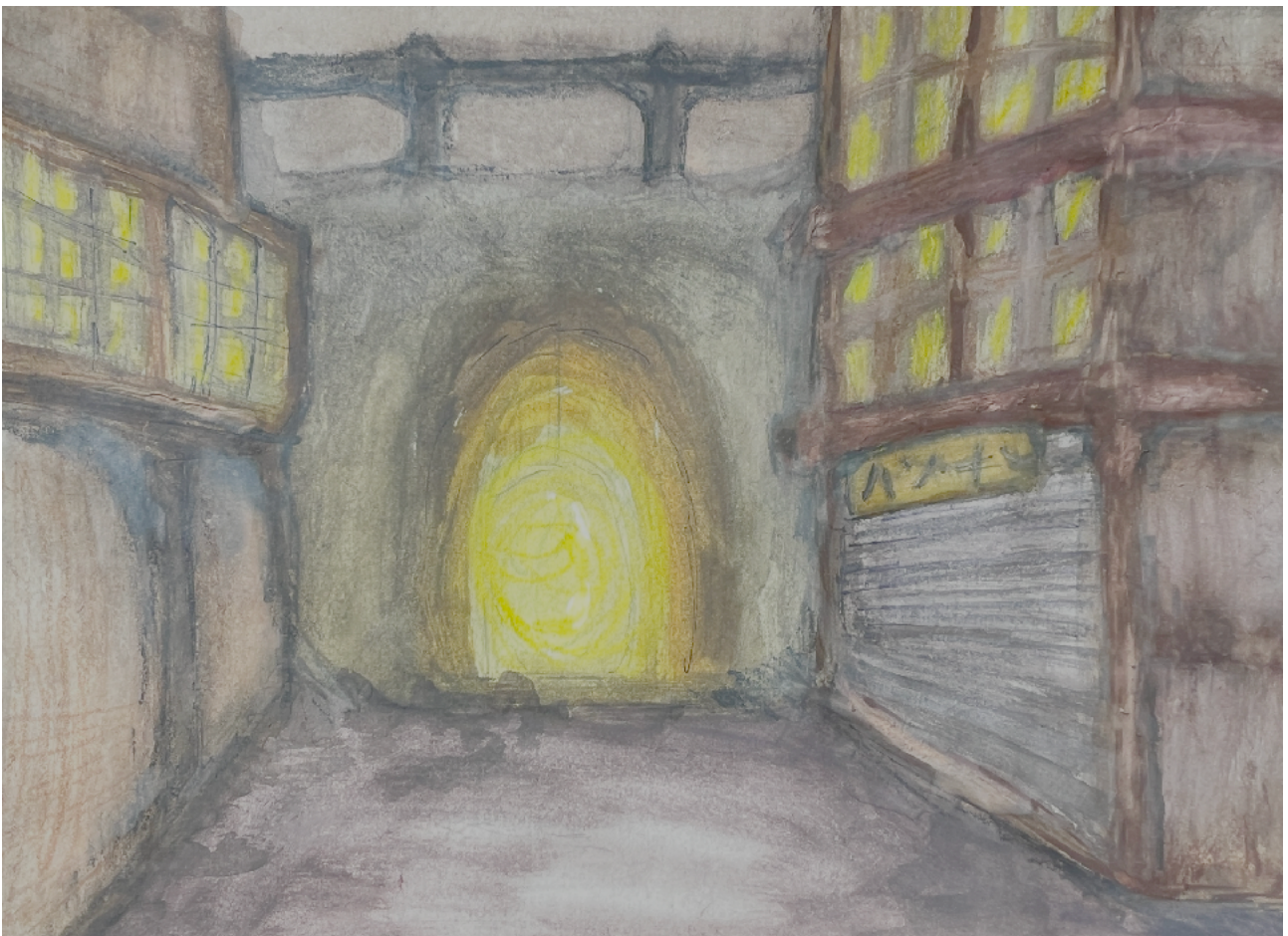
Ronan looked at Reed, the weight of his unintended actions crashing down on him. "How? How do I fix this?" he asked, desperation in his voice.

Reed's expression softened slightly. "Can you recreate the project? Can you build the time machine again?"

Ronan hesitated. "The main component is tritium. It's very rare to find... I stole it from my professor's lab back in 2016."

Reed nodded, a stern determination in his eyes. "Then we find it. We'll gather what we need. You have to go back and stop this from ever happening. Start building the time machine! In the meantime, we will put our lives on the line to ensure you get that fucking tritium and put a stop to it all, even if it means I cease to exist."

Ronan felt a surge of hope mixed with the heavy burden of responsibility. He knew he had to make things right, no matter the cost. Burdened with expectations, Ronan pulled himself together, a deep resolve showing in his eyes.



Vlad Banica - Untitled

Illustrationen von Lilli H. und Lilly T.

By the year 2098, the Earth had become a shadow of its former self. Rising seas had submerged entire cities, and unrelenting heat had scorched the land into a barren wasteland. Resources were scarce, and humanity had splintered into hostile factions, each desperate to survive in a world stripped of abundance.

Thomas, a seventy-year-old man with weathered features, trudged through the desolate landscape with his granddaughter Yvonne close behind. At twelve years old, Yvonne was a rare glimmer of vitality in an otherwise bleak world. She clung to a battered backpack containing their last scraps of food and water. Thomas knew that their survival depended on finding fresh water soon. Rumors of an untouched aquifer near the ruins of an old city had driven them forward for days. These whispers often led to disappointment, but the faint hope of water was too critical to ignore. Thomas, though aged and scarred by countless battles, pressed on, his resolve anchored in his duty to protect Yvonne.



As they reached the outskirts of the city, the remnants of a once-bustling marketplace came into view. Rusted signs hung askew, and the skeletal remains of buildings loomed like ghosts of a bygone era. Thomas scanned the area, his senses alert. They were not the only ones who had heard the rumors, and other scavengers could already be lying in wait.

"Grandpa, is it safe?" Yvonne whispered, her voice tinged with apprehension.

"Safe doesn't exist anymore," Thomas replied, his tone steady but grave. "Stay close to me."

Venturing deeper into the ruins, they finally discovered a fissure in the ground where water glimmered faintly below. Relief flickered in Thomas's chest, but it was short-lived. Emerging from the shadows, a group of six armed men approached, their expressions hard and desperate. Makeshift weapons—clubs, knives, and a single rusted gun—gleamed menacingly in the dim light.

"This water's ours," growled their leader, a burly man with a jagged scar bisecting his cheek.

"Walk away, old man, and we won't hurt you."

Thomas stepped protectively in front of Yvonne. "We've come too far to turn back now," he said, his voice firm despite the odds. He could see the desperation in their eyes; negotiation was futile. These men were survivors, hardened by a world that had stripped away their humanity.



The first attack came swiftly. A club swung toward Thomas, but he sidestepped, countering with a sharp jab from his makeshift spear. Chaos erupted as the fight began. Yvonne scrambled to hide behind a crumbled wall, clutching her backpack as her grandfather battled with a ferocity she had never seen.

Thomas managed to wound two of his attackers, his years of survival experience honed into instinct. But

his age and the overwhelming numbers soon took their toll. A blade slashed across his arm, and he staggered, blood staining his sleeve. Still, he fought on, driven by a singular purpose: to give Yvonne a chance.

"Run!" he bellowed, his voice raw and commanding. "Go now!"

Yvonne hesitated, tears streaming down her face, but the urgency in his voice propelled her into motion. She darted into the ruins, her small figure disappearing among the rubble. Behind her, the sounds of battle raged on until a sickening crack silenced them. The world seemed to stand still.

When the attackers finally left, having taken most of the water, Yvonne crept back to the scene. Her grandfather lay motionless, his body battered and broken. Blood pooled beneath him, and his breathing was shallow. Yet his eyes, though dim, still held a flicker of warmth as they met hers.

"Yvonne," he rasped, each word a struggle. "You're stronger than this world. Don't let it... break you."

"Grandpa, please," she sobbed, clutching his hand. "Don't leave me."

"You'll survive," he whispered, a faint smile forming on his lips. With one final exhale, he was gone.

Yvonne sat beside him for what felt like hours, her tears carving tracks through the dust on her face. When she finally rose, the weight of loss bore heavily on her small frame. But as she looked at the fissure, now nearly dry, a spark of determination ignited within her.

She scavenged what little remained, using her resourcefulness to craft a container to carry the precious drops of water left. With one last glance at her grandfather's still form, she whispered, "I'll make it, Grandpa. I promise."

Then, with resolute steps, she walked away from the ruins, her figure small but unyielding against the vast, unforgiving wasteland. Thomas's sacrifice had planted within her a fierce will to survive—a glimmer of hope in a world desperate for light.

Julius Küderle - Thought Police

Illustrationen von Aurélie V.

The city hummed with a cold, mechanical rhythm, its towering buildings stretching toward a perpetually overcast sky. Below, the streets were a maze of surveillance cameras and Thought Police officers, their faces hidden behind emotionless masks. Thoughts were currency here, and the cost of freedom was unimaginable.

In this bleak world, Alex moved with high precision. By day, he was a loyal officer of the Thought Police, enforcing the regime's iron grip on the minds of the populace. But by night, he was a Whisperer, part of a secret group of rebels who had discovered a way to communicate telepathically, evading the all-seeing eyes of the government.

The Whisperers met in abandoned tunnels and crumbling buildings, their thoughts a chorus of defiance. Elara, their leader, was a beacon of hope in the darkness, her charismatic speeches and unwavering resolve inspiring the group to push forward. Maya, a tech-savvy genius, had developed the telepathic communication method that kept them connected and undetected. Darius, a double agent, walked the perilous line between loyalty to the regime and dedication to the cause.

The day of the planned revolution approached with a tension that was palpable. The Whisperers had created a plan to disable the thought-monitoring technology and free the minds of their fellow citizens. But the regime's head, known only as The Enforcer, was relentless in their pursuit of control. They would stop at nothing to maintain their stranglehold on the populace.

One fateful night, Maya was captured during a raid. The Whisperers' secret was at risk of being exposed, and Alex faced an impossible choice: rescue Maya and risk everything, or proceed with the revolution. The weight of guilt and fear pressed heavily on their shoulders, but the thought of a world where free thought was possible pushed them forward.

The night was thick with tension as the Whisperers infiltrated the regime's control center. The Enforcer's guards were everywhere, their movements synchronized and intimidating. Alex led the group, their mind racing with strategies and backup plans. Suddenly, alarms blared, and the control room erupted into chaos. Guards poured in from every direction, and the Whisperers found themselves in a desperate battle.

Alex ducked behind a console, their heart pounding, as laser shots filled the air. *Over there!* Alex shouted telepathically, directing a small team to flank the guards. They moved with precision, disabling several opponents with swift, calculated strikes. But the Enforcer was prepared. From a hidden panel, automated drones emerged, targeting the rebels with deadly accuracy.

Maya, who had managed to escape her captors and rejoin the fight, hacked into the drones' systems, disrupting their commands. *I've got this! Just keep them off me!* she transmitted to the team. The room became a battlefield, laser beams cutting through the air, striking walls, and sending sparks flying.

Alex charged forward, engaging in hand-to-hand combat with one of the guards. Their movements were swift and calculated, years of training in the Thought Police paying off as they disarmed their opponent with a series of precise strikes. Elara, armed with an energy blade, fought alongside them, her leadership and combat skills shining through.

"Focus on the drones!" she commanded, her voice steady and unwavering even in the chaos. "We need to give Maya more time!"

Darius, leveraging his knowledge of the regime's tactics, directed a small group to take out the control panels. *If we disable their communication systems, we can create enough confusion to gain the upper hand*, he thought, his mind a whirlwind of strategies.

Just as they thought victory was within reach, The Enforcer appeared, wielding a formidable energy weapon. "You cannot win," they sneered, firing a devastating blast that sent Alex and Maya sprawling. The force of the blast tore through the room, causing consoles to explode and debris to rain down.

With the last of their strength, Alex managed to reach the control panel. *Maya, now!* they shouted telepathically. Maya, bleeding and barely conscious, activated the final sequence, and the thought-monitoring technology shut down with a resounding hum.

The city fell silent, a collective sigh of relief sweeping through the streets. The regime's power was broken, but as Alex looked up, they saw The Enforcer escaping through a hidden exit, a new weapon in hand.

"I'm not done yet," was the last thing he shouted...

