

DEAD ORIGINS

By T.S. Kramer

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It was late summer when Lenny, a thin and awkward man in his late twenties, was consumed by the potential love of a young Croatian beauty, Ana. She was a green eyed, brown haired girl, whose timid sensibility captivated him. It was the first real shot at a relationship in quite some time for the young man and his nerves had reached the breaking point. Their first date was a failed attempt at a romantic encounter. Lenny had brought her to a remote spot by the waterfront and pulled out some wine from the trunk of his 85 Oldsmobile cutlass. They shared laughs and he sat close to her but the moment of truth never materialized. The big kiss that he planned did not come to fruition, and although it was what he wanted more than anything, somehow he couldn't find the courage to move in. He took her back to her friend's apartment where she was staying and hugged her goodbye. That was the end of it. He cursed himself for his paralysis in the face of true love, his absolute ineptitude and low self-esteem that deprived him of happiness. It was as though some unseen entity was sabotaging his life one failed relationship at a time — that was why he pounced at the opportunity to see her again. A mutual friend named Jasna had invited Lenny to join her and Ana, along with Ana's twin sister Amilija to go swimming. Jasna was perhaps intervening with the intention of helping poor Lenny resolve his relationship issues. He was fully aware of this and was determined to put his best foot forward. This time nothing would stand between him and Ana, especially his own fear. He would start by finding the right place to swim. His first choice was the Clearwater quarry. It was an hour outside of town and beautiful with its limestone cliffs and almost completely transparent water. The only trouble was its popularity. There were bound to be throngs of teenagers infesting the area. To top it off the quarry was on private property and known to be visited by county police. None of this was acceptable to Lenny, knowing the fewer obstacles the better. He decided it was better to go with secluded. Lenny made the arrangements to go with Jasna, Ana and her sister Amilija on the Saturday.

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The road was unpaved gravel that snaked along the swampy land. The area was covered in layers of sedimentary rock, and evergreen trees that looked red and stunted. The girls talked amongst themselves as Lenny listened on. Ana argued in Croatian with her sister; he realized he was seeing the intimate lifestyle of the two girls. He watched them talk in the back seat as Jasna played music from her cell phone and tried to get the attention of the twins. Lenny was just content to be in the current situation. As they drove along the bumpy road, Lenny noticed an abandoned building through the thick woods. He was too busy navigating the rough terrain with his unfortunately large vehicle, but managed to glimpse a place that was long forgotten.

When they arrived at the road that led to the quarry, there was a steel fence that lay open. As they drove through Lenny noticed that there was in fact a large sign that had been discarded in the bushes a few meters into the woods —the surface overrun with weeds, years of dirt and rust. It was illegible. The bumpy gravel was hard on the Cutlass, and Lenny became privately concerned which caught Jasna's attention.

“Are you sure we're in the right place?” Jasna asked with a veiled message to Lenny; ‘make sure you don't embarrass yourself.’

“I think this is it,” he replied. “It's been awhile since I've been here.” The twins were too preoccupied in their disagreement to even notice, but once in awhile Lenny would catch in the rear view mirror, Ana looking at him; the two would share a moment before he turned his eyes back to the road. A few moments later they arrived at the water's edge. It was a small murky lake perhaps a half kilometre in diameter —surrounded by a reddish clay shore with several hills. The largest hill was on the far side and covered in bushes and trees. The sun continuously peeked through patches of cloud as occasional gusts of wind rippled across the water.

“I like it” Ana proclaimed which prompted Lenny to turn around.

“Do you?” He asked. She nodded.

“Yeah it's nice!” Amilija added.

“Is it cool that we swim here?” Jasna asked him.

“Sure it is,” he assured them, “look there’s people here.” Just as he said the words he felt disappointment upon seeing the group of young men jumping off the main hill, — shouting and hollering as they hit the water. The girls didn’t seem to mind so Lenny pretended not to care. It was perhaps to his advantage — keeping the other girls busy while he and Ana found somewhere more private to talk.

They took their towels and a small cooler of drinks that Lenny had prepared and walked to other side of the lake, still a fair distance from the rowdy boys. Ana and Amelija took turns dipping their toes in the water, then finally taking a few steps in.

"Lenny come in. The water's nice!" Ana told him as they idled by the shore. Lenny ignored the surprisingly cold water and followed the twins. As they went further in he noticed a distinct sulphuric odour the he dared not mention. They finally let their bodies succumb to the chilly lake and swam out a ways. Ana stopped and looked at Lenny, the water pulling at her wet hair.

“Let’s all hold hands and float on our backs,” she said, “absorb the energy of the lake.”

Lenny wondered what else they might be absorbing. He took each of their hands and they stretched out, floating. He could feel the water battling with the air for his body, and felt the sun shine down on his face. Above all else he could feel Ana’s hand, even though he wasn’t entirely sure who was who.

Back at the shore, Lenny watched the twins drying themselves and tried to look sexy, pushing out his chest and slicking back his wet hair.

“Amilija, come jump off the cliff with me,” Jasna said. After a moment to look at Ana, Amelija smiled.

“Ahh okay.” She took her towel and followed Jasna toward the hill, leaving Lenny alone with Ana. The two smiled at each other in awkward silence before Ana spoke.

“Wanna go for a walk?”

Lenny nodded and the two of them strolled along the opposite side of the quarry, towards the woods. There were other man made lakes in the distance that Lenny hadn't noticed before.

“Can you smell that?” She asked him then laughed.

“Yeah, sorry I thought maybe this place was better than it is”

"No I like it here. I'm glad we came!"

"You think so?"

Ana smiled and nodded as she looked at him.

"Did you see that building when we drove in?" She asked Lenny; he didn't realize she'd noticed through all the commotion with the others.

"Yeah I did. That was cool."

"Do you want to go look at it?"

"Yes actually, and here I was thinking it was just me," he replied. She let out a small genuine laugh. The two of them walked around the perimeter of the lake until they reached the road going in. They could hear the screams and splashes of the girls as they jumped in the quarry. The gravel road was full of holes and weeds making Lenny realize it was a miracle they hadn't got stuck. After a ten minute walk along the forest path, they caught their first glimpse of the building through the tangled web of trees. It was off a short distance past a ravine and a black swamp full of dead trees; a large old brick warehouse with a white office building attached. The walls were exceedingly eroded, and the surrounding land littered with industrial barrels and piles of debris.

"How do we even get over there?" She asked.

"It looks like this used to be the road," Lenny replied, pointing to a path of broken pavement with tall grass sprouting up in the middle. As they made their way onto the old road which was even worse than the one they drove in on, they noticed some of the larger trees had been cut down and placed over the path.

"Why would they block the road?" Ana asked.

"Your guess is as good as mine. Do you want to go back?"

"What? No let's go look at it, don't you want to?"

"You lead the way," Jack said, "I just didn't want to pressure you into doing anything you didn't want to do, which I guess is my problem."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing," he smiled. Lenny moved in and put his hand on her arm. "Are you ready?"

"Let's go," she replied, and began heading towards the forgotten structure.

They walked around a final patch of trees and towards the factory, which was bigger than they first thought. There was a walkway with an aluminum roof which had collapsed, attached to a three storey building with boarded up windows. Vines grew up the walls and branches hung like a canopy over the roof. The evidence of the factory's days in operation had been covered over by years of nature's erosion.

“This is something.” Lenny said.

“It's amazing!” Ana replied with genuine awe. Lenny was again reminded of his mission to bring home the kiss he had so far failed to achieve. Somewhere in the tangled weeds and broken glass was the perfect place to become intimate, —to show her he loved her.

“Do you want to go inside?” He asked her.

“Okay,” she smirked as if daring him to follow. With careful steps they continued along the outer edge of the collapsed platform to the main entrance. Ana slipped through the narrow opening in the steel door and disappeared. Lenny had to force the door open slightly to get in; his hands were covered in dirt and rust which he wiped onto his swim trunks. Inside was a labyrinth of steel columns supporting a second floor that disappeared into the shadows. The windows were mostly boarded up, except for a few broken ones obscured by vines

“Wow!” She said with astonishment. “This is amazing.”

Lenny was equally impressed by the gloom of the forgotten building, but wanted desperately to get the elephant in the room out of the way. He leaned in and stared into her eyes.

“Let's see what's down there,” she said, pointing to the dark hallway on the opposite side of the decayed ruins. Before he could kiss her, she began to walk forward; his intuition told him she was avoiding the moment for some reason. Lenny followed her into the darkness. It stunk of mildew and the strange sulphur he'd previously experienced at the lake —probably from years of chemical contamination, he thought.

The entrance to the hallway was covered in electrical cables that were at one time attached to the ceiling. They walked through the mess and into the hall.

“Watch your step.” Lenny said as Ana tip toed around parts of the building that were strewn along the floor. They slowly moved down the hall towards a steel door that appeared to be locked. Lenny checked to make sure.

“Locked,” he said.

“Really? This place is so crazy. I love abandoned buildings, did I ever tell you?” She said playfully.

“No, but now that you mention it so do I,” he tells her. “— And strange locked doors.”

“I'm glad we can here,” Ana said.

“Are you kidding? I love it here,” he says, prompting a laugh.

“Now if only we knew what was behind that door.” she says with a slight disappointment in her voice.

“Well let's see this thing.” Lenny moves in for a closer look at the lock. “Maybe I can pick this.”

“Really?” She says. Lenny searched for something he could use to fit in the lock; realizing nothing there was useful he looked for something larger. He was in luck. A few dozen feet away there was a thin steel rod that he could use to break the lock. Ana laughed.

“Plan B?” She asked.

He laughed in return and tried to pry the door open at the edge of the lock. The door was loose enough that he could wedge the bar in between. He pushed and pulled with all his strength but it failed to open. Lenny started to worry that he would feel embarrassed as he struggled with the steel rod. Then the lock suddenly broke free from the frame and the door opened with a loud clang that reverberated through the building.

“I can't believe you did it!” She shouted with glee.

“Neither can I.” Lenny said opened the door to reveal only more darkness.

“Are we gonna go in there?”

“I think we should,” she said.

“This is getting crazy,” Lenny laughed and let the steel door swing to the side. He walked in first to see a stairwell leading down to another area.

“There's a fucking light on down there,” he whispered.

“Holy shit!” She whispered back with her hand covering her mouth, “do you think anyone's down there?”

“It was locked from the outside. So I doubt it.”

“I want to see what's down there. Don't you?”

“Sort of,” he tells her with hesitation. “It smells bad. Really bad.”

“Okay maybe not.” Ana concedes.

“Well if there wasn't a light down there I definitely wouldn't go. Maybe I'll just take a few steps down and peek.” He told her. Ana nodded with enthusiasm. Lenny looked at her and wondered if this was the moment to go in for a kiss. It occurred to him that he might be risking his life somehow by going into a strange dark hole, and would die never having known what it was like. All of this was considered in a few seconds before it happened. He moved closer and

guided his lips to hers, where they stayed for a brief moment. He tried to look at her eyes in darkness, but could only make out their faint oval shapes looking back at him.

“For luck,” he said.

“For luck,” Ana replied with a smile. He had trouble in that moment reading her intentions so without further delay he started down the stairwell. She watched him descend into the dim unknown void.

“Ana you’ve got to come down and see this.” he shouted.

3

With the abundant white clouds overhead moving slowly across the sun, Jasna and Amilija had become acquainted with the three young men, drinking on top of the hill along the south side of the quarry. There were several trees that hung over the edge, providing shade for the group. The young men found the girls attractive, and had become excited. They jumped repeatedly into the dark murky water below. One of them however, refused to leave the girl's side. Paul was a muscular man with spiked blond hair and a dark tan. He continually asked questions, trying to engage in conversation with the girls, all of which made them grow tired of his persistence. Jasna made a telling look to Amilija and after a moment to process, she broke the news to Paul in mid sentence.

“We have to find our friends, nice to meet you,” she said.

“Yeah nice to meet you,” he replied, “maybe we can get together sometime.”

The girls started heading down the dirt path, through the bushes to the bottom of the hill. They laughed at the eager young men shouting goodbye from the water — one of them came running out of the water, arms stretched out in search of a hug. They ignored him and continued into the woods.

The girls entered a path through the forest; it was a different route than Lenny and Ana had taken. Their walk was partially a means to escape quickly from the irritating young men. However, these men were now feeling the call of the wild; having been in such close contact with the two young beauties on such a summer's day, they were already plotting to follow them. The girls moved further along through the serene wilderness, arriving at a creek; there were a series of rocks in the water they could use to cross. Jasna balanced herself clumsily along the protruding rocks while taking hauls from her cigarette. As they reached the other side she noticed someone in the distance, standing among the trees.

“Oh my god, what the fuck?” Jasna asked.

Amilija looked at her with confusion and then to the person in the woods who was now walking towards them. It was a man wearing a dark brown body suit and a helmet with a narrow

slit to see through; it was tightly fitted with padding over the arms, legs and torso. The man was moving quicker now and the girls instantly felt alarmed.

“I don’t like this,” Amilija exclaimed and took Jansa’s arm. Before they could run, the man took aim with a handgun; a long cylindrical silencer was attached to the barrel. He fired two shots which pierced through Jasna’s chest and stomach with a muted thud. Amilija opened her mouth to let out a scream, just as a whispering bullet flashed through her heart. She dropped to the ground, her head hitting the dirt with a thud.

The man no longer hurried; he walked the rest of the way to the girls. The ground around them began to turn dark as fresh blood mingled with the soil and leaves. The armoured man crouched down and turned Amilija over, then touched her face with his gloved hand. He heard shouting echo through the forest. After a moment, he picked her up, hoisting her limp body over his shoulder and walked into the forest.

Lenny felt like an anthropologist discovering a new world. The thrill of kissing Ana; whether or not she was interested in his advances, and the trek into a secret place he knew absolutely nothing about, filled him with an intense boost to his spirit, —a natural high. The stairwell led down to another hallway, with a single light near a door thirty feet away. On the left side were several other partially open doors. Lenny treaded carefully in his worn out sneakers, he took a few steps forward before looking back to check on Ana as she came down.

“What is this?” she asked him in a whisper. Lenny shook his head, he waited for her to join him and they moved forward together in the near darkness. As they approached the far door, Lenny noticed that the hallway intersected with another corridor that stretched along either side.

“Well...” Lenny whispered. “This is private property. How far do you want to take this?”

“How far do you want to take this?” She whispered back.

“Are we both talking about the same thing?”

She smiled at him as she walked by, taking the doorknob and turning it. The door opened with a whiney creak. Lenny was fascinated by the situation but wondered if Ana really had feelings for him at all. As she entered the dark room he couldn't help but think Ana was acting disinterested, and he was beginning to feel sad about it. As these thoughts stumbled into his mind in mere milliseconds Lenny heard Ana gasp and cover her face. A moment later he became engulfed by the putrid smell.

“There's something dead in there. Let's get out of here,” she told him.

“This place has power,” Lenny said, noticing the small lights, most likely from a computer. He held his nose and waited for her step out of the blackness before he went in; finding the light switch by the edge of the door, he switched it on. The incandescent lights of the room buzzed and flickered to life revealing large room. There was a computer console in front of a large black window and shelving units full of equipment along the opposite wall. The computers were in sleep mode but they were powered, which gave Lenny his first real inkling of concern.

“This is serious private underground shit.” he whispered.

“Where’s the smell coming from?” Ana asked him. “Look at this,” she said. Lenny looked over at Ana standing at a table with a box of suits made from material that resembled leather, but harder and padded. There were three helmets placed behind the box —rectangular in shape with soft edges and made of a very hard material. The eye piece was narrow and slanted downward from both ends.

“We probably triggered an alarm or something, we should get out of here.” Lenny told her.

“You're right,” she said as she hit the space bar on the main computer. The screen came to life, revealing a complex series of codes with a large window that read: **BYPASS / ACTIVATE**

“Woah!” She said. Lenny joined her at the console to investigate. This prompted Lenny to push the enter key, switching the highlighted box from **BYPASS** to **ACTIVATE**. A buzzer in the next room sounded for a brief moment, and a strange high pitched frequency turned on. Ana cried out in terror and covered her ears.

“What did you do?” She screamed. “Let’s get out of here!” The console was full of coloured buttons including one area labelled ‘lights.’ He began randomly pressing buttons without hesitation. Then, the lights in the next room suddenly came on. Lenny and Ana were completely unprepared for what appeared through the dark glass before them. The lights in the large room were slender and red, illuminating a circular railing and irregular shapes on the dark floor. They were bodies! Ana backed away from the window in shock. Lenny was unable to look away, hoping his mind was actually hallucinating the decaying bloated flesh, most of which were in hospital gowns. His gaze turned towards the face of one corpse; it was green and glazed over with sunken eyes that had turned into a pale mush. He forced himself to look away, turning around to see Ana with tears in her eyes. He looked once again at the deceased sprawled along the floor at complete random, then at the console; he was sure they had discovered something profoundly horrible that he couldn't understand.

“Look!” He shouted. Through the glass, he could see something was happening to the bodies.

“I have to get the hell out of here,” she begged him. Lenny was now transfixed. Something he dared not consider was appearing before him. The high pitch frequency, he thought. The bodies were moving, he knew they were; somehow someone had found a way to bring the dead to life! The corpses slowly moved their arms, their fingers, their heads. Before long the first one began propping itself up and unbelievably, rising to its feet.

“How?” He asked her. Ana ran for the door only to be stopped by a figure coming in the room from the hall. It was a corpse of a man; its eyes hollow, and its naked body swollen with bruised skin. It silently felt its way in the room with its shiny hands, as though it was following the sound of her voice. She ran screaming as it walked in, one slow step at a time. The high frequency sound permeated the background. Lenny held on to Ana as they slinked around the edge of the room away from the blind cadaver awkwardly moving into the centre. He took Ana by the hand as they ran around the body and into the hallway; in the brief moment as they past the adjacent hall Lenny saw more of the walking bodies emerging from the dark. Somehow they weren't contained inside the room. Lenny and Ana ran up the steps to the upper plank and out the door, slamming it shut behind them.

5

Paul and his friend Marco walked through the forest with only their bathing suits and sandals. For some reason that neither of them wanted to explain, they had been quite stealthy and spoke very little as they looked for Jasna and Amilija. The path at last came to the edge of the flowing stream, Marco felt it okay to speak up.

“I got the darker haired one,” he shouted over the babbling water.

“Keep your voice down.” Paul whispered with a serious look, then grinned mischievously. They had just finished their first year of college and were best friends; their epic summer was full of house parties and trips to the cabin, concerts and meeting girls. This seemed to be another piece of the never-ending adventure. They walked up an incline on the other side of the stream and reached the top with a hearty enthusiasm, even though the path leading up was just a short ways further. Paul was the first to notice her.

“Look,” he said with a smile. He and Marco began walking towards her; as they moved past the brush obscuring their view, they saw her holding onto a tree with both arms, her head slumped over.

“What the fuck?” Marco mumbled. The two young men hurried towards her — as they came close, they saw Jasna, using the tree for support, her shirt and bathing suit soaked through with blood.

“Jesus Christ!” Paul blurted. He walked up and grabbed her shoulders to prop her up, looking at her face. Jasna's eyes were closed.

“We gotta get her outta here!” Paul said and held her close. Marco seemed to hesitate at first but then moved in to help take her other shoulder.

“Ah fuck!” Paul shouted as Jasna clamped down with her teeth onto his throat, he felt the slicing of his skin as she bore down with all her strength. His throat tore open. He started hitting her with the side of his fist. Her head knocked back, losing her grip and allowing Paul to tear himself away. Marco, already several feet back, looked on with confusion and fear as he noticed the lifelessness of her eyes. Jasna looked up and struggled with her movements as she stepped towards them. Paul held his neck as the blood began to flow over his hand and down his chest.

His terrified eyes looked at Marco while he struggled to keep his legs from buckling. Marco took a few more steps back as Paul fell to his knees, the shock of his lacerated neck taking all his strength away, leaving him to fall down completely, —just as Jasna moved closer. She dropped to her knees before him, taking hold of his arm. Paul looked over helplessly at Marco, their eyes locked in a moment of terror, as Jasna bit into his arm. Paul to let out a gargled scream. Marco ran.

6

Lenny and Ana had run with vivid horrors flashing through their minds; the corpses, the rotten odour, the damp green faces falling off their skulls. ‘Horrible’ he thought. The branches whizzed by his eyes as he ran —occasionally looking over to see Ana’s horrified face cry out for her sister. They hurried through the black mud that surrounded the creek, and moments later the two had found the path leading back to Lenny’s car.

“Amilija!” Ana shouted between heavy breaths. The boys by the quarry were gone, but Lenny could hear what sounded like their voices somewhere in the area.

“I think they went that way,” he said, pointing beyond the quarry. Ana tried calling her sisters cell phone.

“No signal,” she said.

“Come on, they’re probably with those guys,” Lenny said and took her hand.

“They were exhausted from running, and each step became harder as they reached the larger hill where the group had been diving.

“Amilija!” She shouted again and looked at Lenny with a sudden confusion. “What was that?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” he replied. “I didn’t know I was turning something on.”

“We have to find them and get out of here and call the cops,” she told him with a quiet yet frantic voice.

“I know,” was all he could muster as a response. They hurried along the path behind the hill. Lenny knew there was no normal way to respond to the circumstances; he’d become rather disoriented as he thought back to what he just saw. It seemed more like a dream than anything real, and he began to question if it had happened at all. As this illusion theory began to take hold in his mind, confidence began to return and he felt relieved to at least be holding her hand.

“Stop,” she said and bent over, grabbing her knees, “I feel sick.” Lenny stopped. He put his hand on her back and tried to console her, which seemed to only exasperate the feeling.

“Don’t touch me!” She cried. Lenny’s arm reactively jerked away. Ana closed her eyes and took a slow deep breath in; after a moment of this she had improved and stood up.

“Your lips are blue,” Lenny told her with a monotonous mumble; unable to formulate his inner fear.

“I feel sick from that place,” she whimpered.

“Jasna!” Lenny shouted, as if to change the subject. Despite Ana’s discomfort they hurried down the path that lead to the creek. As they neared the water, Marco came running down the embankment and splashed clumsily through the flowing stream.

“Call the cops!” He yelled at them as he hurried past at a distance. “Call the fucking cops!”

“Wait!” Lenny shouted.

“Did you see my sister?” Ana asked him, but Marco wasn’t listening, he kept running back to the quarry. Lenny took Ana’s arm and they moved forward towards the woods and the old abandoned factory. Through the overgrown path they noticed something in the distance; Ana called out for her sister, but there was no answer. They ran at a sluggish pace out of fatigue and Ana’s deteriorating condition. As they approached, they could see it was Jasna, crawling on her hands and knees through the muddy terrain. Ana called to her with no response. As they moved closer, the situation became apparent. Several feet in front of her, crawling through the mud, was Paul—the young man from the quarry—holding his hand to his neck and dragging himself with his other arm. Jasna’s pale eyes remained fixated on him as she took one step, and then another.

“Jasna,” Ana said to her, but there was no response. Lenny stepped towards her, attempting to take her shoulder. She turned towards him with eyes that could barely focus, blood oozing from her mouth. Lenny moved away; she looked at him, and through him simultaneously, before turning back to Paul, who was no longer moving. She continued to crawl towards him in slow jerking movements.

“What do we do? Is she dead?” He asked, looking over at Ana, who at this point had her hand over her mouth in disbelief, her bloodshot eyes full of tears. As Jasna approached Paul she took hold of his ankle. Making no sound at all she tried biting into his leg. Lenny grabbed her by the hair and pulled her back causing her to violently swing around. She began to stand up; her eyes now focused on Lenny.

“Oh my god,” Ana whimpered as Jasna started walking towards him; her bloody mouth gaped open yet not a single gasp emerged. Paul was now in the initial stages of getting up; he stared at

the ground while sitting on his knees, the blood that had been running from his neck had reduced to a trickle.

“Lenny...” Ana said as they watched Jasna’s dead body take her laboured steps toward him, while Paul rose to his feet yet was clearly no longer alive.

At first, Ana and Lenny ran in different directions; Lenny yelled for her and their paths united, sprinting towards the old factory they had originally fled.

The tall man in the armoured suit carried Amilija through the empty and decrepit factory. He brought her to the dark hallway and dropped her before the door that Lenny and Ana had broken into. After a moment digging out the keys, he went to unlock the door only to notice the damage. He looked over at Amilija lying dead in her bikini and blood soaked halter top. He heard screams in the woods, calling the name Amilija.

The man then removed his helmet, which required detaching it from the neck support, revealing a tired weathered man of around fifty years, his dark hair greying at the sides. He removed a cell phone from one of his pockets and began typing in a message. After a few frustrated moments, he removed his right glove and threw it to the floor, then sent the message. The voices were closer. The man then put his phone away and took Amilija by her feet, dragging her to the door. He pulled at the doorknob; the door opened to reveal a corpse in a hospital gown, the eyes nothing but dark holes that showed the contours of the skull. The rotten skin receded from the mouth, revealing the yellow stained teeth and dark gums. It opened its mouth wide and just as the man (still holding Amilija's feet) turned around and noticed the hideous sight, it had reached out with its decaying hands and wrapped them around the man's head, pulling him quickly towards its gaping mouth. With one swift motion it had clenched its teeth down on his nose. The man screamed as blood squirted and oozed down his face. He frantically searched for his knife and pulled it from the holster, pushing it through the dead man's head. Dark blood came pouring out onto his hand, and he delicately pulled the corpse off his face with grunts of difficulty. His breathing was erratic. He moaned in agony and held his face.

"Amilija!" Ana cried from within the belly of the empty building. The man dropped the knife as he squinted in pain. Another body was walking towards the doorway from the depths of the underground laboratory. He hoisted his body forward and rammed the door closed. The injured man slid down the door, nearly falling over.

"Did you hear that?" Ana voice reverberated through the building. He could hear the voice of Lenny telling her that he'd check the hallway.

“I don’t want to go over there,” she said. The tired old man with his nose mostly chewed off fell to the floor, his hand shook as he lifted up his gun and pointed the long silencer towards the other end of the dark and filthy hallway. The shape of a person appeared in the depths. Lenny walked into a sliver of light at the far end and into the sights of the man with the silent gun. He slowed his breathing down, and aimed, focusing all his strength to hold still. Something from the corner of his eye caught his attention. He turned to see Amilija sitting up and staring at him with her soft white cataracts. At that moment the pain overtook him and all the strength he had left drained away. The gun dropped from his hand.

“Amilija!” Lenny shouted. Ana appeared and screamed at her sister while Lenny held her arm, keeping her from running over. Amilija crawled toward the man in the armour as he groaned and tried to lift himself up. His body began to go into cardiac arrest, and he dropped like a stone. His eyes filled with involuntary tears as he began to die; watching through watery eyes, the dead girl rise before him and slowly approach his mangled bloody face.

The last thing he saw was Lenny grab hold of Amilija, pulling her away. The girl’s dead body fell to the ground in a tangled pile of limbs, slowly trying to get back up. Lenny was sure Amilija was one of them and said as much to Ana as she tried to come near. Ana refused to accept this and repeatedly tried to break free from Lenny’s grasp.

“It’s too late, we have to get out of here!” Lenny pleaded. “We have to get help.”

“I’m not going anywhere without her,” she cried. Lenny and Ana kept taking steps away from Amilija’s corpse as it stood up and began walking towards them. Lenny then started to fathom what was happening: whatever he did by turning on the machine was now spiralling out of control.

“He’s wearing the same suit,” Lenny proclaimed as if putting another piece of the puzzle together. “He uses it for protection,” he continued, feeling an excitement that transcended beyond his infatuation with Ana, or his fear and astonishment at the scientific achievement, however horrible. He felt the desire to think beyond himself, to give himself for a greater good; and in this giving he would receive an inner peace that would do away with the anguish of love or fear of the dead, come to life to devour him.

“Don’t let her get near you,” Lenny told Ana with intensity, “you hear me? don’t let her touch you.” He pulled her back to a safe distance from Amilija’s rigid body, shuffling forward silently like a mannequin, except for the dragging feet and dripping blood on the pavement. Lenny

rushed over to the man and looked at his dead eyes staring at the ceiling. With determined speed he looked for a way to remove the armoured suit. The chest padding was attached by several straps on the side, Lenny took them off and removed it, revealing the front zipper.

“What are you doing?” Ana cried out as Lenny struggled to remove the man from the suit.

“That thing I turned on,” Lenny said as he peeled the man’s arms from the sleeves, revealing his pale hairy skin. “I have to turn it off,” he continued.

“What?!” she said from across the room as she walked around her sister, trying to stay a few feet away. She pleaded with her eyes for her sister to wake up, —despite the large bloodstain on the front of her shirt.

“This thing can protect me, all I have to do is go down there and turn it back off, and you have to go, get away from her!”

“I’m not leaving her here,” she told him with resolve.

“Please!” Lenny said with desperation; he had the suit almost off the man’s legs. The older man had only underwear and socks underneath. Lenny took off his running shoes and slipped his legs into the suit, he became enveloped in the strange brownish grey leather material, full of reinforced padding with a peculiar design. Ana moved around in circles as her twin sister followed —her arms stretched out towards her, and her head tilted slightly to one side. Lenny put on the gloves and then attempted to attach the helmet. It was long and his head did not reach the top. It seemed too difficult to secure the strange helmet so he left it unlocked.

“I’ll make sure nothing happens to her, please go!” He yelled through the helmet.

Ana cried out in anguish at the thought of leaving her sister, —to leave her this way, yet she could not stay a moment longer and ran. She ran down the long dark hallway to the main cavernous warehouse that gave out streams of afternoon light through the overgrown windows. She ran out into the sun, the green, and all the life of the world, and away from that hell. Ana ran further still down the hill and almost straight into Paul’s fresh corpse stumbling forward with eyes half open. As she cried out in terror she saw Jasna not far off walking sluggishly towards them. Ana slipped and fell in the mud, and took far too long trying to get a foothold before standing up, just a few feet away from Paul’s bloody body. She ran and gasped for air as the feelings of terror inside swept over her with a devastating chill. Leaving the sleepwalking bodies behind she made it to the creek, and further on, back to the quarry where she began feeling ill once again, this time much worse than before.

Lenny wondered if he'd see Ana again. He knew that he'd never be able to love her, yet his heavy heart lifted, knowing he was about to put an end to the madness created by this man lying dead before him. Amilija stood with her head cocked to one side as if listening to something, but paying no attention to Lenny who stood right in front of her. He watched as the middle aged man gradually stood up and looked around with those lifeless white pupils and no nose. But he paid no attention to Lenny.

Lenny opened the door and another corpse came stumbling out. It had a glossed over face, swollen eyeballs and its dark tongue hung out to the side. He picked up the gun and waited until after the body had stepped away from the door, then went inside. The dark stairwell had several corpses making their way to the top of the stairs. He moved quickly past them, knocking one over as he rushed by. This would be the most surreal experience of Lenny's life by far. There were silent bodies walking into the walls and each other, feeling their way around with their slimy grey hands. The light at the end of the hall was dim but he could see the faces of at least twenty corpses standing idle. Most of them had little to nothing left for eyes, and must have all been blind. As he walked through them they touched Lenny with their fingers, bumping into him as he pushed his way through. One body came close enough to somehow notice Lenny was there; it had a large section of hair missing, and the skin on his head pulled back as if it was in the midst of brain surgery when it died. He turned to take a bite of Lenny's shoulder, but the teeth came loose against the armour, and could not penetrate. Others began to notice Lenny as well and started stumbling over each other to get closer. Before long, Lenny was surrounded, — their teeth opening and closing, and their hands reaching for him. He wrestled his way past body after putrid body. They grabbed hold of him but they had little strength to subdue a living person. Lenny could see the flesh falling from their bones, as their faces pressed against the helmet, obscuring his view. He forced his way forward but fell over several bodies on the floor, then several more fell like dominoes on top of him, weighing him down. He struggled to get up as they grabbed him — their fingers breaking, and their skin sliding off limbs. He crawled forward

with great difficulty but still could barely see past the legs of the bodies still ahead. Lenny began to fight them off, and in close quarters he used the gun; pointing it up from below the jaw of a dead woman in a hospital gown, he pulled the trigger. Blood erupted from the top of her head and she collapsed. He shot several more; some in the body, which had little effect but to slow them down. He stood up as they hung on to him, and with each stride, he shrugged more of them off. He pushed them and hit them with his fist, doing everything he could to get to the room and to the computer console. As he forced his way, the bodies thinned out and he saw the entrance to the control centre. He made a dash for the door and rushed into the room, several bodies stood swaying to and fro, and the high pitched frequency still stung his ears through the helmet. He ignored the bodies and shut the door behind him. One of the cadavers seemed to hear the commotion and began shuffling towards him. Lenny moved to the console to see the lights still on; the observation window revealed the room he first saw the bodies in, but now they had all found their way into the hall. He looked at the controls and tried to find the appropriate command, the one he'd seen the first time; `BYPASS/ACTIVE`; but he only saw long streams of code and indecipherable jargon. The first body reached him and had its skeletal hand on his shoulder; Lenny, feeling anger and adrenaline built up inside, shouted as he threw back his elbow in its face, knocking it back. He pressed the enter key, and after nothing happened, he pressed the space bar. The body was regaining its balance as the other corpse grew closer. Lenny went to the main file directory and looked through subheadings, he searched for anything that could turn the terrible machine off. Then he found it, the bypass command he was searching for. He opened the window and pressed it. The signal immediately turned off, the high frequency sound disappeared and the bodies standing behind him collapsed to the floor. He heard them tumbling over each other in the hallway. The macabre invention that could raise the dead was now off. A sense of relief had passed through him, but also an intense sadness that had been held back until that moment. The feeling was only partially realized as the end of the innocence he knew. The simple search for love had been replaced with the most foul of discoveries ever seen. His dreams ruined.

Lenny stepped over the bodies of the dead and made his way outside into the darkness of the factory hall. The bodies of the middle aged man in his underwear and Amilija, lay peacefully on the ground where they had fallen. He took off the uncomfortable helmet and threw it on the ground; thoughts and questions of what happens now began seeping into his traumatized mind.

The events that followed were very chaotic and subject of much speculation. As the police and ambulance arrived, Ana was taken to hospital with a severe fever. Lenny was left to describe what had happened, but realized that his words sounded preposterous. Marco however, would corroborate his story. The local authorities were shown what was later described as a massacre. They had the entire area closed off and began an arduous investigation. Soon afterwards the Federal police arrived, and by the middle of that night, the army reserve had created a quarantine zone that stretched for two miles in all directions. By that time, the severity of the situation had not yet been realized, when all of the first responders began showing signs of fever, discolouration of the lips, and soreness of the limbs. The technology that was discovered in the basement laboratory was not made public, but the plague that spread from that putrid biohazard spread faster than anyone could have imagined. Touching something that had been touched by an infected person or even being in close proximity was enough to contract the pathogen. Despite Lenny's description of events, no-one who contracted the disease came back from the dead, but death came to the infected within twenty four hours. A state of emergency was declared due to a mysterious outbreak. As for Lenny, after pleading with authorities he was allowed to see Ana at the hospital. She could barely move and her face was pure white. Hooked up to an I.V. and breathing tube in her nose, she struggled to speak.

"I'm glad you finally kissed me," she whispered.

"Don't do this to me," he replied.

"I was into you..." with those words she fell unconscious, never to awake again. After the twenty four hour period and the reports of the disease spreading, it was clear that Lenny was somehow immune. Despite other questions that no one understood about his involvement, he was now patient zero of an unstoppable plague. He would go on to be tested at various facilities for months afterwards. His description of a sound, or frequency that activated the bodies was too unbelievable for the doctors and scientists he told, but Lenny persisted that the pathogen was activated at the time perhaps inadvertently when the technology was implemented. The questions and tests did nothing to stop the deadly disease, and before long, the entire globe was panicking

over the accumulating deaths. After several days, the death toll was in the hundreds, and by a week it was in the thousands. The pathogen was so powerful that it almost immediately mutated and became airborne. The origins of the plague then became a series of rumours, conspiracies and myths that revolved around a young man who unleashed death to the world.