

THE END

The glow of the screen radiates divine lights in my dreams, like fifty fireflies dancing in the sky. I can still feel the rust against my frail fingers. Who would have thought, one machine could expand a single human's lust for life. Every night I do this, hunched over this dying piece of plastic and metal in secret, waiting... Then out of the painful hum*Ping*

"Ello end. ope ou're well. t's ot ee. So ot. 'm sck to deat o ths ateul weahe. ow are ou end?"

I rush to type back, in case this grotty old computer decides to finally pack up.

"'m good end. ave a plan. A wa out. A wa to get back ou wold. To stop the mcros" I hit return and watch as it leaves my outbox, the only outbox left on this side of the world. And I wait. *Ping*

THE BEGINNING

Many of us didn't believe in global warming, deemed it a false rumour to spark conspiracy, fear and squalor amidst the already aggressive and rebellious population. But as the years went by, the air became impossible to breathe, forcing people indoors and into the arms of technology. Which, of course, meant that even more radiation was released into the air, filling it with more deadly toxins and more gasses. And things got worse. Much worse.

The government said that they'd find an answer at any cost. We thought we could make a barrier to slow global warming down, believe or not! But when they said at any cost, they didn't say anything about raising the taxes by twenty- five percent. As you can imagine, no one was overly pleased with this and by not pleased I mean fuming. There was an uprising and government officials were made to reveal information about their plans to stop global warming. When the rebels got the information, they put it on the internet so some random computer master could decode it. What we could scramble together wasn't a code to anything important, to be honest, this was more a jigsaw puzzle than a code. All we needed to do was put the pieces together and see what we got. By the time we found out the truth it was too late!

The government had placed little machines in the clouds called micros which squirted chemicals into the atmosphere and the Earth. Their idea to stop global warming was to cool the planet. The breeze became a vast blizzard and the air smelt of frost, the blue sky mixed with the green to make a peculiar turquoise, it was almost fascinating. But to my dismay, plants were dropping dead, people were choking on their own words, telegraph poles dispersing frozen fragments of wood, this was truly the apocalypse we had all been waiting for.

BECAUSE OF THE INTERNET

The rebellion died with the plants and all seemed lost.

Well, that was until 2052, the Great Power Down, when the government put a stop to all non essential energy use. We'd run out of electricity and they deemed all mobile phones and computers non essential. No more Facebook, texts and emails. No more browsing, searching and social media. No more emojis and hashtags. 2052 was the year the internet stopped, and with it a billion friendships died. Since then we've been looking for an answer to get it back.

Those who didn't die of cold were put to work trying to find energy from somewhere. In 2063, the year of vast achievement, we found a way of extracting nuclear energy from the radioactive residue found in Chernobyl. We finally had energy. But the government, who were so nearly destroyed by the internet, didn't give people the computers they craved. And because the people weren't connected any more, the government could pretty much do anything it liked.

THE F IN FRIEND

Five years on and I'm still here, but only because of my two jobs. I work as the cleaner for one of the members of the government's house and a metal trader, selling scraps of tins, screws and other various objects. And that's where I found my 'F'. There, under a nest of wires, a little square key from a computer keyboard. Small comfort in this harsh world. I secretly slipped the F into my pocket and carried on my demeaning job.

You see, the government's main goal was to put us in a point of submission and offer us jobs as their servants and to add insult to injury, if we attempted to talk against them there would be no money, which is the equivalent of death in this wasteland! When all my jobs are done, I go on my computer. Now you may be asking, "In a land with no technology, how does your computer work?" As a metal trader I get all types of metal; wires, fans and even rundown computers, as it turns out these three things are enough to make a reasonably well running computer. And now I had my F, I could see if it really worked.

Almost the first thing I did when I got it working was attempt to find out if the micros had affected other countries. I scoured the internet to see if anyone else had a computer. I found lots of old accounts but no new ones. However, there was something to do with a link that spiked my curiosity (and my fear also). My computer might not be able to handle the procedure connecting to the page and break under the pressure and this was the only computer that worked successfully. After a long skirmish between my options, I thought, "It's worth a try I suppose!" *Click*. I watched in awe as the run down machine attempted to connect as if its life depended on it, as I looked at the screen of the almost rustic computer I didn't know what to expect, as I listened to the soothing sound of rusty metal scraping against each other until a large sigh came out of the speakers and the screen went black. Most would lose hope but that already happened to me.

Four fans, two computers and seven wires later, I got a more modernised computer up and running, something that could withstand the procedure,(well, hopefully this would work...) *Click* Resting my head on my hand, I watched wide eyed as if telling the computer that I was on the edge of insanity and it would witness my rage first hand if it didn't co-operate! After a minute I closed my eyes and thought, "I spent hours trying to create something that would help me find contact, yet it's making me feel more isolated than welcome." Suddenly, a distant whisper filled my ear. It took me a while to process it, a ding, an almost silent ding, I looked into the computer and saw to my excitement a message. As it unfolded, I saw a simple yet friendly piece of writing, "Hello..."

I AM NO ONE

I messaged back, “Who are you?”

“No one, at least no one of imminent concern.” I thought of something clever to reply with, but my thoughts were shrouded by disbelief. “So where do you live?” I grimaced at the thought of the reaction, the anonymous person would have to that one. “Over the sun, as far east as east goes.” My irritation was getting the better of me and an impulse of frustration was taking over my broken mind. “I didn’t try joining this server for hours, to be barraged with stupid riddles, you hear!” I smirked at the thought of what the unknown user would reply with, “All will be answered friend, but it will only be repeated once, as time is of the essence and we’re running out of it.” Friend. I hadn’t heard that word in a while. I thought of a question I could give but I was asked one before I could reply. “Who are you?” I replied “my name is...” “Wrong.” I frowned at the screen and decided it would be best let him or her finish, “You have to be like me if you desire to know the truth, in this world there is no knowledge of you, you are forgotten, forsaken and just another burnt piece of paper, you have to keep silence and observe from the shadows, listen carefully and when asked who are you? Say, “Whoever you wish me to be!” Lead them in circles, confuse them, frustrate them, hear the anger in their tone, once you’ve done that you have trapped them in a cycle that will puzzle the mind and loosen the tongue, and then... you know more about them than they know about you, by telling the truth that you are...” I jump in, “That you are no one!”

WITH FRIENDS LIKE THIS...

Over the weeks, we exchanged information using the tactics I had learnt from the anonymous person. I learnt after decrypting riddle after riddle that he was a man like me, and he lived around Agadir, but was born in Medway in England. Making me think that he was on holiday there and wasn’t able to return due to the micros. I told him I lived in Alaska, it was kind of ironic he lived in vast heat, I lived in the vast cold, I still struggled to understand him of course. He still made it difficult to comprehend what no one meant. But each night I

looked forward to his message. A ping of friendship that made life almost bearable.

I went to my cleaning job the next day and my boss had the TV on (only the rich were allowed such luxury especially the government). I scowled and shook my head, then as I swept the stained birch wood in the kitchen I heard a gasp from the lounge, I peeked around the corner and to my shock I saw my face on the TV. How had they found me? Believe it or not I was fired that day because I gave my boss a bad reputation for hiring a misfit who thought he was worth something but wasn't. I agreed with him, I wasn't. All I had was a badly built computer and for now that was enough.

DOVES, DIARIES AND AIRFIELDS

I woke the next day to the mesmerising tweets of doves and the less than lovely sound of rusty jet engines, (I was surprised they even got them flying buckets working). Obviously I wouldn't know what was going on in the airfield, it was military property (what's left of the military anyway). Ever since the government froze most of the country and citizens with them micros, we haven't had a secure country. I got in my oversized jacket, put on my wellington boots and decided to have a peek at the fighter jets. The airfield wasn't really a secret, it was hiding in plain sight and what's worse, is it had hundreds of holes around the fence, meaning anyone could fit through. I heard the cold yells of the drill sergeant and the clumsy marching of cadets, to be honest with you it sounded more like a zoo than a military base, but I wasn't really surprised. Peering through the fence I remembered one of my friends in the rebellion, James Clark, now that was a real mate! We would sneak into the apple farms at the dead of night and see who could steal the most, afterwards we would venture home drenched in murky water and sweat. Then he was shipped overseas, somewhere in the east to fight against the terrorist threat, never heard, nor found what happened to James again, no matter how hard I looked! He did send one or two letters and his personal diary, asking me how I was and telling me that being a soldier was tedious, boring and no different to boy scouts, but I knew deep down he was enjoying the little things. The travelling, the marching and mostly the pride to call himself a soldier.

APPLE

Hunched over the computer again I waited for the ping.

“Ello end” I was confused. What did this mean? Was this another riddle?

“No more riddles” I typed “What do you mean? Who are you?”

“ABCDEFGHIJKLMNPOQRSTUVWXYZ” My heart sank. No F, R, I and no H. Ello end must mean Hello friend. His computer was dying and I knew how hard it was to find replacement parts.

“Before your keyboard dies, I need to know. Who are you?”

I waited, wondering how we’d be able to talk if more letters were to stop working. Then came the reply.

“Apple”

Apple? Then it clicked. The happy nights spent stealing apples. Could it be... James Clark? My friend. My only friend.

As time wore on, our keyboards wore out. Every time a letter died writing got harder, but we always found a way to understand each other. We had to.

SKY

The years didn’t improve life, and it certainly didn’t improve the weather, which was turning from bad, into awful. The sky was homing in on Earth slowly but surely and when it did, we would all have to be prepared for the worst. I was already in my house, huddled in a corner, warming my hands on two matches attached together. My dad had always said that two matches last longer than one, all I was doing was seeing if this was true. I had also placed my computer in the corner of the sanctuary, just in case I needed to record the last documents of my life. You know, just as a precaution. The windows started to freeze up and the door handle started to go blue, yet this was only the start of much more tragic events. My feet attached themselves to the floorboards, forcing me (at my dismay) to peel them off. This was only going to get worse so I ripped up some of my floorboard and made a fire. I turned on my nearly frozen computer and immediately typed to the anonymous

person, “’m freezng up on ths sde, ow about you?” I spelt the last word and waited for the reply. I looked at the letters on my keyboard, when I noticed something. Some of the letters had frozen up entirely, I pressed on them expecting it to slowly push down, yet still they wouldn’t. I looked up at the screen, somehow the message had gone through intact. I pressed down on all the letters seeing which ones worked and which ones didn’t. Unfortunately, the situation was worse than I anticipated, only the A button worked; ironic, the start of my name at the end of my time. I got a reply, “J,” I wondered what J meant, I replied, “A” I thought for a moment, J what could it mean? Suddenly, a disturbing thought went through my head, “J is a start to James!” Then at my time of need my screen went black and darkness overwhelmed me! And through the darkness, I found a disturbed light in my mind, I cradled it and in return it brought me something I have never felt before, frustration, confusion and hope. I will guide hope as it guides me, or as long as I have a frozen breath in me.

T E E N D