

Seven Days

Prologue

The millions of microbes rush into overdrive as the glass cracks and oxygen fills the interior of their confine. Like any organism on earth, their purpose is simply to reproduce. The most deadly killer mankind has ever seen doesn't even have intent. In fact, it isn't even sentient.

A memory enters Kane's head. A beautiful woman, standing in front of him. She blows him a kiss, smiling as she always used to. He struggles to lift his hand in front of his face, the embedded cracked glass glittering in his palm. His eyes follow the blood running through creases in his skin like deep crimson rivers. They worm their way toward the centre of his palms before dripping through to the blackness below. The tiny shards of glass flash like diamonds, glinting in the artificial sunlight. Dazzling rocks decorating the streams of blood. Forcing his eyes to focus ahead once again, he blows her a kiss back. Four hours left.

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He heard the men running up the stairs below him. Ignoring the rising panic, he tried not to think about the soldiers. Horrific, grotesque and contorted with frenzy, the wall of bodies had rolled forward, gnashing their teeth and roaring as if they were one being. He wondered which of them would be unlucky enough to run through the door first.

He leapt up the stairs, adrenaline the only thing keeping him going. Finally, his goal came into sight: the sole room at the top of the staircase. As he reached the door, his shotgun obliterated the lock for him. Shouldering it open, the buckshot also took care – sequentially – of the three terrified scientists in the room. The first and second barely had time to react. In the third scientist's eyes, the gunman could see the other man's life. Loved ones. Secrets. Regrets. Tragically, the twelve lead pellets that individually bore tunnels through the scientist's cranial cavity cared not for nostalgia. He fell, grey matter mixing with blood dribbling onto the collar of his lab coat.

The man who had just destroyed the lives of three wives, five sons and two daughters didn't stop to inspect his handiwork. His boot impacted on the door, slamming it shut. He frantically sealed it off with a heavy metal bookcase. That would hold the sea of inhuman creatures outside. Briefly. Every action became simply another dollar passed to Death under the table. Just one more minute. He looked around for the missile control panel. *This would be so much easier if it weren't all written in god-damn Russian.* Then he recalled his instructions. Navigating through menus by memory of commands and the layout of options, he got to the override screen. His fingers a blur over the keyboard, he finished entering the code and slammed the enter key down. The screen went black, just as expected. Characters and numbers scrolled. He breathed out. He had just prevented the destruction of at least three of the United States of America.

Or rather he would have, if the espionage-acquired training software he'd devoted so many hours to memorising hadn't been secretly fed to his superiors by Russian counterintelligence. The real program varied slightly from its flawed twin. The actual software had no override coding built into it. It did, however, have a text-based portrait of Stalin coded in, programmed to show up if anyone entered in one of the fake leaked override codes. What programmer would be stupid enough to build an override subroutine into a program designed for the use of intercontinental

warheads? Nuclear missile launches tended to be rather well thought out and initiated only with a certain level of conviction. The man stared in disbelief at the symbols that comprised the green image of Stalin's face.

"*You stupid American!*" Stalin had ordered the caption to be, laughing as he said it.

"No. No, please no... no! No!" His fists slammed into the keyboard. He punched the glass screen, the green Stalin slicing open the knuckles on his right hand. The man barely even felt it.

"DAMN IT!" His bellowing was drowned out by the sound of the uninhibited launch of the missile. It continued to rise, faster and faster, until the ground stopped shaking beneath his feet. He howled, beyond hope or reason.

The soldiers were so close; he could almost smell their sweat. He glanced at the broken screen and ran his hand through his hair, leaning against the dented console.

"...I...I couldn't do it..."

The door was snapped off its hinges and the bookcase fell forward as they broke through. As soon as he saw the face of the first soldier, he opened fire; his shotgun on full automatic. He guessed he could take down one, perhaps two men. Six tumbled back down the staircase before the firing pin struck an empty chamber. A tiny click. *I'm out.* The next Russian up the stairs had the same thought. Without stepping forward, he said, in accented English;

"No one will ever know what you did. No legacy. No stories. You only have death left."

A surge of panic rose inside him. The claustrophobia of imminent death constricted his lungs, a burning in his diaphragm. He dropped to his knees.

"Please, wait, I don't want to di-" His last words were cut short by a white hot slug tearing through the neurones he required to speak. The searing metal cauterised the brain where it contacted and passed through the medulla. The man's heart instantly stopped beating. His body slumped to the floor like a dead marionette.

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Kane Mars sat bolt upright, leant over the side of his bed and emptied the contents of his stomach onto the floor. He lay flat on his front for a few minutes, retching and coughing. His hair

was plastered to his forehead, his back drenched in sweat. Tears blurred his vision as he sat back up, telling himself the dream was over.

Longing hit him like a fist to the solar plexus as he looked across to the other side of the bed; that vast expanse of crisp, white, untouched sheet... so different to his own. Choking back more tears, he swallowed and took a deep breath. Releasing it with a shudder, he did his best to cast off the memories of the nightmare, and swung his legs out of bed.

It was the beginning of a fairly standard morning.

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Not a day went by when he didn't find another thing to remind himself of her. Not a day went by he didn't regret his honesty. Complete disclosure was a terrible thing. He couldn't ever keep any secrets from her, though. She'd always sensed he was hiding something. She knew him too well.

She never really knew me... She never knew a damn thing...

He rubbed his eyes, the coffee's aroma filling his lungs. It was intoxicating, just like the smell of her. His thoughts wandered to her porcelain skin. Hair the fiery red of afternoon sunlight streaming through clouds. He knew, though, nothing about his life was her fault. She was just proof that it didn't matter close he ever got to anyone. Nobody in this place would ever be able to bring themselves to accept him. He was living, breathing proof that every single one of their lives were just part of a giant Petri dish.

He had to try to reveal to everyone who- or rather, what - they really were.

Kane looked across at the wall. He saw the posters, clippings and red scrawl covering the white surface as absolutely insane, and yet perfectly ordered. He sighed, a blank expression on his face, cupping his hands around the coffee.

The history of the world... the history of our species...

Some of the pictures jumped off the wall and came to life in his mind. "In The Mood" played in the theatre of his imagination as lines of people streamed into cement blocks. Planes swooped

low, lighting trails of fire on the ground beneath them. The mushroom cloud rose, as below, animals suffered in factory farms and slaughterhouses.

There is so much blood on our hands.

Genocide. Extinction. Corruption.

We've made too many mistakes.

Greed. Power. Abuse.

We came so close to extinction.

The Virus.

Too close.

The Dome.

Only five thousand survivors.

Rebirth. Re-education. Restarting.

No...

...We don't deserve another chance yet.

* * *

There was only one sample of Aeron left on the planet. It was kept in a facility devoted entirely to holding just one vial. Most of the building's occupants were scientists. Their job was to find a cure, should Aeron ever be released again. Considering the nature of the creation, they had as of yet been unsuccessful. Their methods interested Kane, and he understood quite a bit about the DNA re-ionization technology they were currently experimenting with. Science had always been an obsession in his later years of teen-hood. Scavenging the wastelands of suburbs, he had often come across deserted schools or universities, and would gather up whatever textbooks he could. His fixation had led to the equivalent of a combined Master's in Chemistry and Human Biology, as well as the knowledge needed for PhDs in both plasma and quantum physics. It had also had other, darker effects. Kane's dreams had been polluted with nightmares since he was a young child. Sometimes he was a soldier in the Cold War, sometimes the subject of a Mayan ritual sacrifice. He would see his own limbs blown off, or watch his own intestines spill out before waking up, writhing to free himself from the bonds of his imagination.

Kane's thoughts turned back to the task at hand. The scientists would not pose a problem to him. Years in the deserted Earth outside the Dome had left him ingrained with combat survival skills as deep as his scars. The research lab, in fact, was one of the few guarded facilities in the entire city. On a day-to-day basis, there was no need for security in the Dome. A "perfect world," comprised of the descendents of a group of men and women, selected by the United Nations' finest. They were to form the foundations of humanity after the Earth's population was destroyed by a terrifyingly dominant species. The species humans created.

After being released in Russia, Aeron descended upon Europe. There was zero percent immunity. Despite the barrier of the ocean, it spread quickly to other countries. The United Nations decided there was no way to stop it; it was simply unprecedentedly good at survival. It mutated too frequently to create a vaccine, or an antiviral. Aeron spent one hour dormant in the brain and spine, impossible to remove, displaying no symptoms. It was transmitted during this period, in airborne form as well as through bodily fluids. After the dormancy period, it began to reproduce, killing faster than any disease had before. Within two hours, huge spinal and cranial cysts had developed, causing

agonising pain. The victim was crippled and within another hour, the cysts began to burst. Aeron immediately began eating away at the myelin sheath, dissolving and consuming the neuron tissue. No blood. Just bodies, everywhere.

The U.N. formulated a plan. A city was built, encased in an airtight dome, and selected 1,500 people with which to fill it. Doctors, scientists, authors. Selection was predominantly based upon intelligence, although factors such as fertility, physique, health, personality and appearance were also taken into account. Those selected were responsible for rebuilding humanity. The generations were educated ethically and scientifically; however, not historically. The past was never mentioned.

Kane's grandparents were four members of the same generation that were put into the Dome, although they were not in the right "demographic" to be selected. In other words, not a friend or family of the Generals of the U.N.

He wasn't sure how they'd survived, but for his entire childhood, he had believed that his grandparents and parents were the only humans to escape Aeron. That was until he had learned of the Dome. His grandparents had met in the new Earth, each with one infant, a son and daughter. Having matured together, and had only one child, Kane. He grew up outside of the Dome. Wearing a gas-mask for most of his early years, he had spent his time scavenging with his parents to find spare filters, uncontaminated food, and water.

Knowing from his earliest years what humanity had brought upon itself, Kane knew he had to make sure there were no more undeserved chances. Aeron was the only way he could ensure that if the Dome's inhabitants failed his test, the Earth would finally be rid of its cancer. Clad in a scientist's coat and a pair of thin-rimmed glasses, he whisked his way down a corridor, deeper into the facility.

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A scientist glanced up at the lightscreen showing the camera feed of the corridor. He presumed it to be nothing but a flicker in his periphery, and returned to his work. The short, stout man swept down a sleek black hallway, an upbeat smile strapped upon his lips. His silky carbon-black laboratory coat flowed behind him like a dark wave, the white trim a frothing peak. White was the official

colour designated to the scientists. He'd loved the past sixteen years as a Aeron analyst. Reaching the lab room and swiping his card, the door opened.

One step inside, a fist slammed into his throat followed by a palm cracked into his nose with such force that he blacked out. The man rocked onto his heels and fell backwards. His skull cracked on the hard black floor and blood began to pool. Gravity's work. The short man's heart was no longer beating. Kane's own reflection stared back at him, mirroring the expression of repulsion at his own actions. Blood spread across the floor, following him like a grotesque shadow.

Exhaling, he took a moment to look around him. The black walls felt comfortable, but clean. White streaks pulsed regularly across their reflective surface.

Suddenly, the glimpse of another human was reflected in the panel ahead. Kane inhaled sharply, flattening himself against the wall. The other scientist was just around the corner.

Adrenaline coursed through Kane's vessels like acid. The scientist, too absorbed in his portable lightscreen to see his fate, did not notice the reflection of a man wearing a lab-coat, poised, waiting. He rounded the corner, and was immediately tripped up, one foot taking out his knee, an arm to the chest tipping him over. The scientist's whole weight landed on his own neck, snapping it instantly.

Again, Kane had a bizarre feeling, almost regret. Looking down the hallways to his left and right, he came to the conclusion that he was lost.

"Which way?" He sighed. Words scrolled along the wall, attached to a pulse.

WHAT IS YOUR DESTINATION?

Odd... He thought to himself.

IF YOU WISH FOR DIRECTIONS, YOU MUST FIRST DIVULGE YOUR DESTINATION.

Did the wall just read my thoughts?

IN SIMPLE TERMS, YES. THIS WALL HAS BEEN INTEGRATED WITH A METAPHYSICAL PSYCHO-ANALYTICAL COMMUNICATION UNIT. WHAT IS YOUR DESTINATION?

I didn't even know we'd invented that. Is there anything else the government isn't telling us?

Deliberation later. I must keep going. I want to see Aeron.

THIS WAY, KANE.

As he read the words, they disappeared up the corridor wall to his left.

"Wait!" The words were now part of the pulses along the walls, the sentence running past him again every now and then, guiding him. He followed. He moved through countless corridors until eventually, the rhythmic guidance of the words led him to an entryway. The chamber.

And there it was, sitting in a glass case. The organism responsible for the death of a hundred times as many humans as Adolf Hitler.

Not that anyone aside from me knows who Hitler was, anyway.

Aeron was indefinitely dormant in anoxic environments, so the tiny glass cylinder was completely sealed; it appeared as if there was nothing inside.

He knew there would be countermeasures to prevent the vial being stolen. He also knew his best chance was to run rather than fight. Looking around the room, he examined the vial's housing. It was like a grotesque shrine. The glass walls of the pedestal flowed seamlessly downwards and pooled outwards, forming into the transparent floor of the room.

There wasn't much time. Undoubtedly, the wall would already be going through the Dome's civilian database, attempting to identify Kane. It would soon discover that Kane Mars was not, in fact, listed in any system.

He established that the AI must have protocol in-built to stop it rifling through the personal parts of your mind, or else it would already have learned the secrets of his birth outside the Dome. It would already have discovered that any financial, governmental or residential information Kane had ever used was fraudulent.

Kane prepared himself for the task ahead. He had no idea what would happen. The defence mechanisms at the disposal of the AI within the walls were not only unknown to him, it was entirely possible for it to be technology he'd never even heard of before.

Taking a deep breath, he plucked it from its stand.

Suddenly, the calming white pulses on the walls turned blood red and Kane dropped to the ground as a piercing screech drilled through every corner of his mind. The room was silent but for his screaming. Inside his head the wall was amplifying the natural ringing in his ears a hundredfold. Kane scrambled to his feet and shoved the vial into the pocket of his stolen lab coat, spun around and bolted out of the room. Nothing would drown out the noise slicing through his every thought.

His footsteps echoed off the crimson and obsidian walls, matching his heartbeat as he broke into a run. The wall analysed Kane's movement, determining the need for a different approach. Ceasing amplification of the ringing, it overrode the Mental Privacy protocol that had prevented it earlier, and plunged down into Kane's mind. Probing for his darkest nightmares, it wrenched them upwards to the peak of his consciousness.

Kane stumbled, barely managing to regain his pace as abruptly the clean, reflective walls around him twisted away from him. The corridors erupted into trenches in a warzone. The pulses of light became shell explosions and tracer rounds, whizzing past his head as he ran for his life. Heart pumping magma through his veins, he soared past the hard-packed dirt walls, forgetting who and where he was. For a moment, he felt like nothing but a series of synaptic messages, converting chemical into kinetic energy. This nothingness? It was bliss.

* * *

There was a lady sitting at the desk. She looked up, a shocked expression on her face, as someone dressed like one of the researchers sprinted full pelt, straight through the front screen. Kane barely even saw her as he sped through the room, hurtling into what appeared to be a glass panel to the outside world. It was actually a field of accurately directed extremely dense non-harmful radiation. It prevented wind and cold from coming through, but was completely permeable and intangible.

As such, it provided no friction past the atomic level as Kane braced himself for the impact, and kept right on going. He plummeted through the screen, slamming into a young boy. Kane lost footing, tripped, and the boy was flung away, stumbling onto a black glass road. There was a Travel-Tech transport vessel gliding towards the child at tremendous speed. Kane looked up, extending his

hand and shouting, but the boy was far out of reach, a calm expression on his face. As the sensors on the front of the vehicle picked up the obstacle and identified its distance, the calculations were computed automatically.

The two hundred metre long vehicle was no less than a metre away from the boy when it stopped astonishingly fast. Within ten centimetres, the vehicle had gone from its programmed speed of fifty metres a second to an absolute standstill. The twenty metre long inner casing that actually held the passengers inside the chassis continued forward, but electromagnetically slid to a halt over the comfortable distance of the two hundred metres inside the outer chassis.

Kane stopped his cry in disbelief. People around him were staring.

"Are you okay?" He panted. The boy simply stared back. Domers began to gather, their attention attracted by Kane's upheaval. Of course the boy had been okay. Even "perfect" humans could be inattentive, and walk across roads without looking. Automated safety measures had been built in, the boy had been in no danger. Kane's consciousness dissolved out of the warzone of his mind and back into the street in front of him.

I need to get out of here.

He got up and ran. Past the black reflective buildings, neon pulses everywhere. It was all so bright, so brilliant and effervescent. Entire buildings made of the black reflective glass, with bright red pulses outlining the windows. The whole city around him looked like a computer circuit, electricity flowing everywhere, connecting everything at once. Pale cream-coloured lines on the ground beneath him gave plenty of light. He looked straight upwards. Stars floated above his head, bright and plentiful. When he had first arrived in the Dome, he remembered it had felt like looking upwards from the inside of a colossal pin-cushion.

No light pollution...

The constellations were beautiful. They were also synthetic. A tessellation of thousands of screens and lights. Nothing about the Dome was real.

* * *

Everyone in the Dome was taught ethics from their first day of education. Rigidity wasn't a factor, simply the idea of ethical treatment of property, other people and animals, even themselves.

A code of three rules; adapted from Asimov's laws.

1. A human should not in any way (physically, psychologically or otherwise) harm another human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.
2. A human should protect their own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First Rule.
3. A human should obey any orders given to them by the Aristocratic Party, except where such orders would conflict with the First or Second Rule.

The three rules of the Dome were enforced by a subsection of the Aristocratic Party, responsible for the safety and justice of the citizens. Domers found to be in violation of these were given one warning, assuming the offence was minor. If they exceeded this warning, or their initial offence was major enough, a trial was held. If they were found to be guilty, they were swiftly and painlessly killed. There had been very few occurrences of this since the creation of the city.

This system had worked for a hundred years now, spanning three generations. On display in the town square, they were engraved into a beautiful white monument for all to see. They were also engraved on the wall of every house in the city. Kane hadn't had the thorough ethical education of one of the Domers, though he knew he'd already overstepped the first two, and therefore the third as well. It had never sat well with Kane, basing the guidelines of a society on laws intended for robots. However, in hindsight, he wished he'd found a way to extract the vial without killing those two scientists.

It was more that he regretted any human life lost, rather than knowing the Aristocratic Party would now be labelling him as a danger to society. That, however, was going to make things more difficult. After the killing, his mind felt... different. Changed. He wasn't sure how yet, but he didn't want to do it any more than he had to. It felt permanent, like an ugly scar on his psyche. Of course,

the rules above were suspended when it came to the Enforcers.

They were the ones who the Panel of Justice would have sent after him, given orders to apprehend (with required force, "deadly" not exempt) a "rogue citizen." They would soon be at his home, he had to work fast. Gathering up his belongings and tearing everything off his walls, he closed his eyes to the confines of his kitchen, and for a moment, remembered a time when he was happy.

His eyes opened to the cold walls. He cast his feelings of melancholy aside, the apprehension in his gut was growing. He knew he had to leave immediately. He left virtually nothing behind.

Seven minutes and thirty-six seconds later, ten Enforcers found nothing on the premises, with the exception of a rather unorthodox and somewhat disturbing message.

- YOU MUST ALL**
1. A human should not intentionally (physically, psychologically or otherwise) harm another human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.
 2. A human should protect their own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First Rule.
 3. A human should obey any orders given to them by the Aristocratic Party, except where such orders would conflict with the First or Second Rule.
- DO NOT TEST**

The artificial sun warmed his cheeks as Kane stepped onto the obsidian footpath. The photo-absorbent chemicals in the black glass-like substance held in most of the light rather than reflecting it. He appeared to walk with a somnambulant lack of intent, deciding direction only when presented with a choice. Collar held up, keeping an eye out for any Enforcers, he set off down an arbitrary street. Truthfully, he did have an intention. He simply observed the actions of every man, woman and child he saw.

As Kane walked, he saw one man step out of a shop, unknowingly dropping his Cred-card. Another man hastily walked out behind him, and bent to pick it up. He took a few steps toward the first man, now several dozen metres away.

Come on.

The second man's steps slowed.

Come on...

He stopped, looking back and forth between the card in his hand and the man, now even further away. Kane watched him weigh up the opportunity cost. Looking around, he subtly put the Cred-card in his pocket and walked back inside the shop.

What a testament to the attitude of Domers. If only the Aris-P could be informed of even the pettiest of crimes, no propagation of evil would spread, and the spores of wrongdoing would die off.

Kane let out a sigh, and pressed his fingers into his forehead. He continued to saunter towards the centre of the city. A man and a woman stood in front of their house. Kane watched tears roll down the man's face as he silently extended her arm, a ring held between her fingers. She couldn't bring herself to look him in the eye.

She turned away, stepped onto the footpath and walked down the street. Tears fell from her cheeks; huge drops of guilt and regret. Selfishness. The man looked down at the ring, then across the sleek road at Kane.

"I'm sorry." Kane offered, tentatively.

"You're not as sorry as I am," the man choked. "She was perfect. I...I'm going to kill that bastard... He stole her from me!"

Kane looked him in the eye for a moment, then turned and began to continue down the path, his hands in his pockets.

"It will not help you," he called over his shoulder. He quietly added to himself "nothing will."

Eventually, Kane reached the middle of the city square. A bustling hub of activity. People, moving, all around him. His eyes shifted in and out of focus. This was it. He could return or even incinerate the vial, and none would be harmed. Hide it, somehow remove it from the Dome. No more bloodshed, no more human life wasted.

He watched two children chase each other around, smiling and laughing. He sometimes wondered what actual happiness felt like, or if he already knew and it just hadn't been defined to him. It seemed to go hand in hand with naivety, though; something he had never had the pleasure of experiencing. Perhaps there was no way of knowing. Had huddling with his father and mother as they tightened his gas-mask and said goodnight had been "happiness?"

He didn't really remember. Taking the tiny glass tube out of his pocket, he peered into it. Inside the vial, Aeron lay dormant, deprived of its lifeblood. It had spent over a hundred years in that glass prison. As he looked up, he saw the two children again. His brow furrowed as he observed one child scrambling to his feet, yelling at the other. The first was laughing. In almost slow motion, he watched the second boy push the other backwards. The first boy twisted and fell, brutally. Tears mingled with blood.

It...It is within humanity, isn't it? Despite ethical education from the first possible moment in childhood, humans still steal, cheat and harm each other. They are not even taught those concepts! Where do we get the knowledge from? What more can possibly be done?

Kane's fist tightened around the vial. His face contorted with the burden of what he was about to do. He inhaled deeply, holding it for what seemed like an eternity.

And then, he breathed out. His grip loosened.

Not yet. They...they need more time.

He looked at everyone around him. The children were back to playing with each other, best friends again, like a pair of lion cubs.

* * *

A crowd gathered in the square, surrounding the colossal marble monument that bared the three rules. Overnight, it had been covered by three huge images. Each image depicted a different member of the Panel of Justice breaking one of the three rules.

One man hitting a child, one woman with tear-smearred makeup running a razor across her hand, and the last man on the Panel shown accepting a bribe from a silhouette. Kane had managed to acquire a Photoshop from his descents into the hidden archives of the city. A horrifically outdated computer-based tool, but crudely effective.

All three Party of Justice members were utterly innocent of the crimes depicted in the images; however, that would not stop the outrage of the general public. It would finally begin to rot the public's unquestioning trust of the government.

* * *

If they can work together;

He thought to himself, as the spade sliced through the dirt.

If they can maintain rationality and order in spite of everything I do...

He had been digging for over ten hours now, and had achieved a seven metre deep hole. He was in the sparsely populated industrial section of the Dome. It was on a day that the system did not have a regular maintenance check-up, so no-one would see him. After hours spent digging down one side of the telecommunications building, he finally reached the single fibre-optic cable, responsible for all the telephony and internet in the city. The TelCom logo of an eagle stared down at him whilst he dug.

I'll have no trouble accepting that we deserve another chance.

He took out the laser cutter, slicing cleanly through the cable.

Beautifully simplistic. Like cutting the Gordian knot.

Just to make sure, he inserted a double-sided mirror into the split in the cable. He paused for a moment to survey his work. It was such a small physical act, yet it had the potential to cause so

much chaos.

Good luck to them all.

Kane didn't have high hopes.

* * *

Kane had stolen the Cortisol and Melatonin from the medical clinic the previous night, drugs that were used to treat patients with insomnia or drowsiness respectively. This was to be a risky part of his plan, as he would have to visit the water treatment plant twice.

The human body is so easily toyed with. We are a slave to chemicals; utterly helpless against them. I suppose because we are simply chemicals ourselves, and nothing more.

Kane hadn't slept a full night in over three years. His sleep reflected what he dreamt of.

My rest has been broken and beaten. Shot, killed and stolen from me...

He had to pause, as he carried the bag of Melatonin powder towards the facility in the light of dawn. This was not a vendetta.

My ambition is not for empathy. Come on, Kane. You're testing their knowledge, not teaching them a lesson.

He continued forwards. He hadn't returned to his home since he had stolen the vial. The Justice Panel would already be extending tendrils through the city. Something like what he was doing was utterly unheard of. They would desire swift action against him. In case murdering two scientists wasn't enough, he also needed to insult them, to undermine their integrity with the posters. They wouldn't find him, though.

I wonder if they'd let me off if I turned myself in...

He smirked.

He continued lugging the bag towards the water. As he neared the hatch for access to the water supply, a maintenance man rounded the corner. Both of them stopped dead and stared at each other.

"Uhhhh..." Kane hesitated.

"Hey, you're... you're that one from the news, the one who's killed those ten, aren't you?"

A puzzled look came over Kane's face.

"Ten? Definitely not. Two deaths are the only ones I can claim direct responsibility for.

Where did you hear ten?"

"The broadcast netwo- Wait, why am I discussing the body count? Should I not be trying to prevent you from doing what you're doing, or something to that accord?"

The two men circled, each wary of every movement made by the other. Fists bunched tightly, the atmosphere was synaptic. The man appeared to be as anxious as Kane felt. He hoped he was hiding it markedly better than his confronter.

"Your government has lied to you. I have only killed two. Both scientists. However, if you attempt to get in my way, that number will undoubtedly have to rise. I would advise that you simply run. And... don't drink the water."

"Poison?"

"No. I'm not a barbarian. Trust me, don't drink anything but bottled. Now go."

The maintenance man hesitated for a moment, then turned and ran.

He had no way of knowing it wasn't poison. Yet he let me do it.

Kane rubbed his temples.

So, it would seem the government are lying. Integrity lost... They have also been corrupted by my actions. Disappointing.

He sighed. Twisting the cover off the water access hatch, he poured the powder in. Melatonin, (the human sleep hormone) in the system's supply meant that anyone who drank water today would have their concentration broken, suffer from drowsiness and may even be unable to stay awake. It would distort their sense of night and day. It would throw people's lives into a form of chaos. They would become irritated and confused. Potentially even hostile.

"In the absence of order and authority...will they unite?" Kane murmured to himself, "Or descend into anarchy, as their predecessors did in the old Earth?"

That was Kane's test. It was time for the individual members of society in this "perfect" city to prove they could survive without a societal hand leading them through life. Finally, it was time to

establish whether or not humans were strong enough as a species to co-operate in order to survive, even when every *status quo* they had ever known was tossed into question.

His eyes glassed over. He stood for a moment, and imagined what it might be like to be a member of the society. Would they be questioning themselves? Their actions? Their existence?

At least I'm giving them a chance.

* * *

Kane timed it perfectly. Just before six, as the Melatonin would be losing effect, he returned to the facility, emptying the Cortisol into the huge steel pipe. Throughout the day, he had found a secluded place in between two sections of the water treatment plant, and had allowed himself a few precious hours of sleep. No dreams.

They should be able to function without one night of sleep... After all, I've had to for the past three years.

Again, Kane subdued the anger rising within him. This was not to be for his vengeance against innocent people. They had done him no harm. This time, he encountered not a soul. Chances are, everyone was either asleep, too tired or too busy to go anywhere near the water plant. He knew the Aristocratic Party would be looking for him, especially the Panel of Justice.

Stealthily, he jogged back to the residential areas. His pace slowed to a walk as he neared the houses and stopped altogether when he rounded the corner. He stopped dead when he rounded the corner.

Broken glass littered the pathways in front of houses, lying on the black reflective surface in horrific constellations. In front of him, two stood in front of a house, both holding onto a large indoor lightscreen. Kane couldn't hear their argument. They were too consumed to notice him as he passed. He walked quickly down further streets, face hidden in darkness. Every now and then, a house had the door broken in or all the windows smashed.

...why?!

Kane felt the rage rising inside him. All around him, people taking advantage of the situation.

Selfish...

Houses being cleaned of possessions while people slept.

...opportunistic...

Turning, he sprinted away. The glass reflections on the street blurred brilliantly through his tears.

* * *

Kane sat on a hill, overlooking the huge agricultural section of the Dome. The morning artificial sun beat down upon a row of black warehouses inside which livestock were grown. The animals-

Not that they're really animals any more... We even managed to take existence out of their lives.

...were kept alive with an intravenous cocktail of nutrients and hormones, dozens of generations selected for fast growth, the animals were grown in a single day per organism. The unessential parts of the organism had ceased to exist. Hooves, eyes and noses, tails; none ever underwent development in these creations. They didn't even spend their day awake. For the conservation of energy, they spent their single day of existence in a chemically induced coma.

A huge conveyor line of autonomous cranes was used to transport containers of the raw meat as well as grains to the processing plants closer to the city. They resembled arms, as if an army of huge robots were trying to claw their way out of the earth. The first crane grasped a container, and passed it to the second, and so on. It was a disconcertingly human action; and yet almost comical.

Like something out of the beginning of Edward Scissorhands.

Kane pressed the button on the device he was holding. The chemicals inside the two jury-rigged charges at the base of the first crane exploded. What was left of the metal framework that wasn't molten and flung into the air sheared and buckled inwards; the crane began to tip. It collapsed into the crane next to it with the movement of some huge behemoth's limb. Clouds of steam rose from severed hydraulic lines and cylinders. Like dominoes he had once played with, each crane knocked the last over; he found a sort of innocent amusement in it. Soon, more than twenty of the structures lay in a twisted wreck. The city's main food supply had just been severed for quite a while.

No longer will we evolve species purely for our benefit. At what point did we gain the idea that nature was our plaything?

Suddenly, a strange thought occurred to him.

I wonder what the next dominant species will be...

The synthetic wind tousled his hair.

* * *

Kane despaired. He fluctuated between numbness and despondency, odium and frustration. The inherent human darkness had set upon the Dome, the tendrils reaching out from within the society itself, suffocating it. He couldn't believe how quickly the society had degenerated into chaos.

Furthermore, his ire grew whenever he tried to ascertain simply *why* it had happened. These were extremely intelligent human beings, the cream of the mental crop. Why could they not cooperate?

Individually, I am positive that each and every member of the Dome would be able to comprehend appropriate actions in this situation. Why? Why, when they are all placed in a common situation, is solidarity nonexistent?

He sat in the middle of the city square, watching people around him. Adults squabbled over groceries like birds fending each other off for crumbs. Youths wandered like lost souls.

Everyone is so desperate for guidance, yet no-one attempts to lead, nor any to follow. They're all trapped in a cowardly purgatory, a limbo of authority.

At that moment, the artificial weather simulation systems (which had not been attended to for twenty-seven hours now) began to malfunction. Rain torrented downwards into Kane's upturned face.

He just laughed.

I hadn't even planned that.

Wind blew powerfully from all directions, hurling the rain virtually horizontally. Kane felt as if he was sitting in an ocean. His hair whipped back and forth, plastering itself over his eyes. He still

stared upwards. The rain was so thick that it blurred his vision of the synthetic night sky, staining the pinprick stars like a watercolour painting.

His tears ran into the freezing rain. Perfectly still other than his shivering and shaking, he sat on the monument in the middle of the square until the hypothermia already lurking threateningly around his lungs began to take hold, an ice-cold ghost's hand tracing spirals on his diaphragm. In dire need of shelter, he stumbled off into the night.

He found a construction site, the skin and bones of a house. Taking shelter in an unfurnished (although mercifully dry) room, he drifted off into the first night of sleep he had had in three years. It was to be his last.

* * *

Kane awoke in the unfinished room to find a teenage boy rummaging in his pockets.

"What are you doing?" Kane asked, shoving him away with such force that the adolescent tripped backwards and bundled into the wall behind him. Kane checked his pockets. He still had his identity card and Cred-card. Strange that the apple in his pocket had been the only thing interesting the boy. Clearly, he hadn't needed money. The teenager scabbled to his feet and jumped out the door.

"Wait!" Kane called, scrambling to his feet, and sprinting after him. Down sleek suburban roads and reflective alleyways he ran, following nothing but the sounds of the scared boy far ahead of him. As he approached the centre of the city, panting, he caught up with the young man. Reaching forward, he gripped a handful of the coat whipping about in front of him and pulled backwards.

"Who?" Kane breathed, "Who did you need food for?" He was about to repeat the question when the boy's expression changed. He was staring down the pathway between two buildings across the road. Someone was crying for help. A girl; half naked, her chest being pushed up against a smooth wall by two grinning men.

"NO! EVIE!" the boy screamed, and leapt out of Kane's grip. He took off, Kane close in tow. "GET AWAY FROM HER!" the adolescent roared, still running towards them.

The men turned to him, scowling. The boy pulled a kitchen knife from a makeshift holster on

his leg. Both men's expressions quickly changed from irritation to fear and guilt as the boy's pace did not slow. Upon reaching the first man, Kane stopped running and watched.

The boy swiftly pushed the knife directly up into the first man's solar plexus, turned and slammed his fist into the other's temple, driving him to the ground. Taking a quick step back, the small teenager swung his leg straight into the second man's nose. Darting over to the stabbed man, he bent down and pulled the knife out, accompanied by a cry of pain.

"SHUT UP!" the boy spat. Enraged and hormone fuelled, he swung his boot into the man's abdomen. She stood, shaking and weeping, her hysterical intakes of breath incapacitating her. Her eyes seemed unable to focus on anything.

"Evie? Evie are you hurt?" His tone was concerned. He received no response.

"Evie, come on! We have to go, come on." He put his hands on her cheeks.

"Evie, look at me, we have to go, come on!"

Kane stepped forward. He spoke calmly.

"Evie." The girl's head jerked to look at him. Her eyes stared into his soul.

"Evie, you must leave this place. Go. Stay with him, he will protect you." The girl's breathing slowed. Her gaze shifted back to the boy.

"Adam, I was so scared..." she whispered, "I love you..."

"I love you too," He put his arms around her, eyes closed, his brow creased.

"but we *have* to go." He took his arms away from her shoulders, and her hand moved to his.

"Come on. We'll stay together." The boy turned to Kane. "Thank you."

"Adam...Get out of the Dome," Kane instructed, calmly.

"But- Wait, what?"

As Kane opened his mouth to speak, his heart leapt as a group of Enforcers rounded the corner. White uniforms. Upon sighting him, they all broke into a jog. He knew there was no way he stood a chance of taking them on. Several were armed, his only option was to run.

"Don't follow your instincts. Trust me. Please, trust me! Get out of the Dome!"

Kane swung around, and began to race down the street. He heard the two youths behind

him set off hurriedly down the alley, their journey in the opposite direction to his. The city square lay ahead, nestled between tall black glass buildings. He reached the marble steps, an iceberg in the black reflective plaza around him. A bizarre thought entered his head, and his pace slowed slightly. His run geared down to a jog, before taking a few more steps and stopping altogether. Standing on the podium, he looked around him at the city he had arrived in as a young adolescent. What was this whole place for?

The whole Dome... It was nothing. In the grand scale of things, it didn't really matter, did it? The entire human race was less than a quark to the universe. Yet, when he had stood here before, he couldn't bring himself to do it. He couldn't bring himself to break the glass.

...why couldn't I do it?

At that precise moment, half the city was cast into darkness as arbitrary panels of the sunlight generating system finally gave out. Huge areas of the city found themselves in pitch blackness, whilst the square Kane was standing in was still brightly illuminated. Looking back down at the vial, he was overwhelmed by a sudden sense of his own mortality.

There was something... something within him. Perhaps it was evolutionary, or perhaps it was his conscience. Perhaps he didn't feel like it was his right to do what he'd been planning. For so long, Kane had wondered if it was misguided anger. What happened wasn't really the Domers' fault. Did they deserve to suffer so? He turned.

The Enforcers were eerily emerging out of a patch of darkness in front of him, materialising out of the inky emptiness between buildings. They formed up in a line, all facing him, whatever weapons were in hand raised. Following the Enforcers were all three members of the Panel of Justice.

He had come to a realization. Humankind weren't perfect, but the human race had certainly learned of its own mortality. There was no way he could bring himself to kill so many innocent people. Ultimately, he knew he never could have. He began to raise his hands, the tiny glass vial still clenched in his palm.

"Don't shoot, I'll surre-" Kane began to call.

"Kill him." The order came from the female Panel member.

The Enforcers opened fire. One bullet, fired from the rifle of one Pvt. Ackerman, travelled towards Kane from precisely the wrong angle. It smashed through the vial before entering the palm of Kane's right hand, destroying the bones on its way through. It exited out the other side, finally coming to rest in Kane's right ventricle. His legs collapsed out from under him.

The millions of microbes rushed into overdrive as the glass cracked and oxygen filled the interior of their diminutive confine. Like any organism on earth, their purpose was simply to reproduce.

A memory entered Kane's head. A beautiful woman, standing in front of him. She blew him a kiss, smiling as she always used to. He struggled to lift his palm in front of his face, the embedded cracked glass glittering. His eyes followed the blood running through creases in his hand like deep crimson rivers. They wormed their way toward the centre of his palms before dripping through to the blackness below. The tiny shards of glass flashed like diamonds, glinting in the artificial sunlight. Dazzling rocks in the middle of the streams of blood. Looking forward once again, he blew her a kiss back.

Four hours left.

Reflection Statement: Seven Days

The title of my major work, "Seven Days" is representative of the chaotic and ever-changing nature of human life, both on a grand timeline, and also on an individual life's scale. The biblical parallel draws themes from the Christian creationist theories. The way I see it, if a world can be created in seven days, it is just as easy to destroy another.

Until much closer to the end of the process of writing my major work than was comfortable, I hadn't clearly been able to group my intended audience into words properly. Upon examining my Major Work during its early final draft stages, the readers who the narrative would appeal more to began to emerge. This is a story that would be enjoyed by people who would refer to themselves as "Futurist-interested philosophers," in particular, people who may understand what it is to have seen the darker side of humanity. Readers should be interested in and have a sound understanding of the conventions of Speculative Fiction, as my story brings the future of the human race into question. Futurists with particular interest in following trends in the development of military science and technology, especially biological warfare and possible effects thereof, will better enjoy my Major Work. Those, also, with specific interest in the loss of humanity and distortion of the Human Condition necessary for humanity's progression, will find something to associate with in my text.

Furthermore, readers interested in dystopian novels like Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* and the communist undertones in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* will associate well with the ideas of the omission of human history from education in order to maintain greater control over citizens within a civilisation. In addition, readers acquainted with the works of Isaac Asimov and in particular his Science Fiction short story *Runaround*, will recognise it as the story from which the rules upon which my society, the Dome, are based upon, and will appreciate my alteration/use of them far more. Ultimately, the readers would ideally be of high-school level or highly educated in areas of English and Speculative Fiction.

Ultimately, the idea of my Major Work is to entertain, as is the goal of all short fiction; however, in terms of thematic content and contextual commentary, it does have several specific goals. Firstly, my story uses the main convention of the Science Fiction genre, and hyperbolises current trends in technological development in order to create a hypothetical environment in which we can see the effects on humanity ranging from an individual level right onto a global scale.

The idea of the "Mineshaft" from Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* was the inspiration for the Dome in *Seven Days*, with the difference relying upon another Science Fiction genre convention, that of examining the reflection of the author's context within the writing itself. Kubrick's work was satirical of the Atomic Bomb scare, but technology has come a long way since then, and Aeron is a deep metaphor, representative of any contextual applicable weapon that threatens to wipe out humanity. This is extended symbolism throughout. The release of Aeron killed off most of the Earth's humanity, both literally and figuratively. The mere fact that so many of our species had been killed by other members of the species reflects the destruction of the humanity in those who chose to release it. The Domers represent the last hope humanity has of rebuilding itself, and symbolically, the last hope we have of regaining our humanity. The purpose of Aeron is to lead the reader to his or her own conclusion about the future effect of warfare on mankind.

Ironically, highly Authoritarian rules such as the harsh punishment for crime and the derivatives of Asimov's laws represent how in order to do this, we must turn ourselves into nothing but machines for the greater good of society, and *Seven Days* questions whether our humanity is worth sacrificing for the furthering of our species. This is essentially to ask the reader to examine the toll of progress on us as a species.

Kane, being a removed member of the society, becomes the catalyst to the reaction that is the future of humanity. He does not cause the society to crumble, merely provides the opportunity for a "perfect" society to fall of its own accord, which, of course, it does. I portray him with little-to-no emotion in most scenes. Rather than causing him to be a flat character, this was to allow the

reader to project themselves into his character better, and yet maintain a greater immersion and association with his actions. Furthermore, his lover is a ghostly apparition of the notion that he would never have belonged to the Dome in the first place as he was an outsider and raised with a completely different paradigm, a concept that evolved from my study of *Belonging* in the English Advanced course.

His actions are resultant from the experimentation with another purpose of my Major Work, exploring the inherently self-harmful nature of human beings. The fact that militaries in the world only exist because all the other countries have militaries. It is a lovely idea that one day everyone could disarm their weapons, and yet I know even in my youth that within mankind, there is always an inherent potential to corrupt a situation to varying degrees in order to benefit oneself.

I have always been perplexed by the seemingly growing selfishness within society. The disregard for rules and policies set in place to aid the everyday lives led by the population of a place or group. The death of common courtesy. Again, the convention of Science Fiction shows that my context is represented within my story. Lord Byron's *Darkness* shares this attitude to mankind with my story, and stirred me to write segments like:

Kane... fluctuated between numbness and despondency, odium and frustration. The inherent human darkness had set upon the Dome, the tendrils reaching out from within the society itself, suffocating it. He couldn't believe how quickly the society had degenerated into chaos.

Personally, I believe my story falls under the category of "Soft" Science-Fiction according to the Hard/Soft Sci-Fi genre theory, in that the technology is present within it, but the actual science of it goes unexplained. As Arthur C. Clarke stated in *Profiles of The Future*:

"Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic."

I expect this means that some would argue my story isn't science fiction, but speculative fiction. I wrote it to have the principles of a Sci-Fi novel, but knowing how subjective all genre-theory is, I'll

leave it up to you to decide which category it falls under. The segment involving Kane's encounter with the Psychic wall, for instance, is a prime example of a stereotypical Asimov-Science-Fiction-born paranoia of an Artificial Intelligence being able to affect us far more efficiently than is comfortable.

An influential text in terms of my attitudes to human existentialism and purpose was *A Big Boy Did It And Ran Away* by the satirical genius Christopher Brookmyre. Brilliant passages like this are dangerous to read, because they make one doubt one's own life:

Overtake the guy in the bigger, newer, shinier car, and it made you forget all the other, truer ways in which he was leaving you in the dust... The SCC's fantasies are uniform and predictable because he has no imagination. He needs advertising to do his imagining for him... They were suit wearers, they had a suit-wearing career in a suit-wearing profession, and nobody, nobody was going to mistake them for faceless nonentities, oh no.

These brutal attitudes to normalcy inspired me to explore the concept of the significance of humanity in terms of the planet, and is the basis for some of Kane's existentialism in *Seven Days*:

*The whole Dome... It was nothing. In the grand scale of things, it didn't really matter, did it?
The entire human race was less than a quark to the universe.*

Seven Days uses fairly standard narrative structure, with the exception of Kane's thoughts, which I simply italicised and treated as dialogue in order to make them prominent and yet smooth, so as to not break the continuity of the text. Feedback indicated that varying the sentence length altered the speed at which the reader read, so in sections where a disjointed tension is implied, Kane's thoughts are emphasised through the use of truncated sentences. His interplay with the narration sometimes simply serves to further engage the audience, such as:

The animals-

Not that they're really animals any more... We even managed to take existence out

of their lives.

...were kept alive...

Through thematic, structural and stylistic control, I have been able to create a narrative that uses the Short Science Fiction medium to comment on and question the scientific, ethical and moral progress of humanity, as well as examining the social effects of removing authoritarian barriers on a society far too undeveloped to be exposed to such freedom.