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Genesis

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Extract

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JOSEPH

You think there's anything out there any more?

ADAM

How long you been doing this?

JOSEPH

Five years.

ADAM

How many you had to shoot?

JOSEPH

Three or four. But they're just drifters.
I meant, you know...

ADAM

They say they've seen new airships lately,
up north.

JOSEPH

I thought that was just a story.

ADAM

Everything's just a story.

JOSEPH

When you think about it, how long's it been

since the plague? The ones left have to have immunity right? So they could be rebuilding. It makes sense.

ADAM

Or they're just taking a long time to die.

JOSEPH

The last ones I saw, they didn't seem that sick.

ADAM

You know they record these conversations right?

JOSEPH

[Worried] You said they didn't listen to them.

ADAM

Unless something happens.

JOSEPH

What sort of something?

ADAM

I could go mad and shoot you.

JOSEPH

Then it makes no difference to me, them

listening or not.

ADAM

So nothing to worry about.

JOSEPH

You think they're rebuilding, then?

ADAM

You ever wonder how come the people we are sent down to shoot never shoot back? I think the war and the plague wiped out a thousand years of progress. I think the new airships they're seeing are just big balloons. I think that's all they can do.

JOSEPH

You know what I feel like right now?

ADAM

What?

JOSEPH

A Coke.

ADAM

I'm not so mad on it.

JOSEPH

How can you not be? You must have had it, at the ceremonies. You must have tasted it.

ADAM

It's just a drink.

JOSEPH

You know they almost lost the recipe. It was only in the very last hour, before the links went down, that anybody thought to get hold of it. Everybody just assumed someone else knew.

ADAM

You're too gullible. It's just a drink.

JOSEPH

It's not just a drink... So what do you feel like?

ADAM

A woman.

JOSEPH

A woman?

ADAM

Right here, right now. You could watch.

How often do you see your wife?

JOSEPH
You know we're not allowed to discuss it.

ADAM
We're not allowed to do a lot of things, Joseph. You know what? I bet I spend more time with women than you do, and I'm not even married.

JOSEPH
That's just big talk.

ADAM
Yeah, that's right, Joseph. Big talk.

And that's where the fragment of recovered transcript ended.

EXAMINER: And what do you think this shows us?

ANAXIMANDER: It shows us something of his character.

EXAMINER: Something admirable?

ANAXIMANDER: Something important.

EXAMINER: Why is it any more than idle chatter? Two bored

men passing the time.

ANAXIMANDER: It reveals personality.

EXAMINER: Explain that.

ANAXIMANDER: Adam is the junior guard. Joseph is five years his senior and has greater experience, yet, listening to the conversation, you would assume the opposite is true. Adam, I think, assumes superiority in any situation. It is important to note this. It is part of the trouble.

EXAMINER: Tell us what happened next.

ANAXIMANDER: Next was the day of the sighting. According to records, Joseph and Adam began their shift at 15.30. The day was warm and clear. The sea was calm. Their
watchtower was built above a cliff face, with views across the strait to the southern island. Their monitoring region extended along a range of ten nautical miles. On a day like this, it was possible for them to see the next watchtower to the north without the aid of a viewing device. According to
the log, Joseph was on watch while Adam monitored the equipment, although it is Adam who noted the first sighting.

ADAM

Well, here we go, a break in the weather.

JOSEPH

What are you on about now?

ADAM

Eyes right, little partner. See it?

JOSEPH

See what?

ADAM

They test your eyes before they put you on this detail?

JOSEPH

My eyes are fine.

ADAM

Must be a brain problem then.

JOSEPH

Okay, now I see it. [Voice rising] I see it!

ADAM

Okay, settle.

JOSEPH
Sound the alarm.

ADAM
It's tiny.

JOSEPH
I don't know.

ADAM
Check your screen, you idiot.

JOSEPH
You know I've got bullets in this, right?

ADAM
You know threatening a fellow Soldier is treason?

JOSEPH
They'd forgive me.

ADAM
No, it's tiny. Be lucky if there were more
than two or three in there. Lucky you didn't
waste those bullets on me.

JOSEPH
It's your turn. Check the roster.

ADAM
Even better.

The two men's eyes flickered from their surveillance screen to the scene in front of them and back again. The image solidified. It was indeed a small boat, just as the scanner had indicated. A communication line from the southernmost watchtower crackled through.

WATCHTOWER
You boys getting that?

JOSEPH
Sure Ruth, she's all ours.

WATCHTOWER
Go get 'em.

ADAM
It's just the one.

JOSEPH
Be careful of that. There might be others hiding.

ADAM
When have you ever heard of any of them hiding?

JOSEPH
It could happen. That's what I'm saying.
You all loaded? Away you go then.
I got your back.

ADAM
Wait a sec.

JOSEPH
You have to go.

ADAM
I just want to see what I'm dealing with.

JOSEPH
I'll let you know if I see anything surprising.

ADAM
Just a second.

Adam stayed staring at the screen. It was against regulations. The assigned shooter had to leave the watchtower before the victim had been identified. By the time the Soldier saw what it was he was dealing with, he had to know there was a gun aimed at the back of his head. It made perfect sense. It didn't matter how good the training was, there would always be a chance the Soldier would hesitate when it came to shooting a helpless victim. And in a time of plague the state couldn't

take chances.

JOSEPH
[His hand slipping to his gun] You know what my orders are.

ADAM
Oh my God, look, it's a girl. It's just a little girl. Where the hell has that come from?

Both of them stared at the screen. The boat was indeed tiny. It was difficult to believe it could have made the journey from the nearest land. Adam saw her eyes. That's the way he explained it to the court. Huge and frightened, staring uncomprehendingly at the great metal barrier rearing up out of the ocean. The makeshift triangular sail of her small craft was tattered and useless. The boat bobbed dangerously close to the floating explosives.

JOSEPH
[Voice shaking] Man, please, get out of here. I don't want to have to shoot you.

ADAM
Joseph, there's something I should have told you.

JOSEPH
What?

ADAM

I've never done this before.

JOSEPH

But I've seen your file.

ADAM

I got it changed.

JOSEPH

How?

ADAM

It's best you don't know that.

JOSEPH

Okay, so this is your first. Don't worry.
It's not too hard. It's just like training.
Once you've got the target locked on,
you don't even have to watch it.

ADAM

I don't think I can.

JOSEPH

I don't think you have a choice.

ADAM

She's just a girl.

JOSEPH
I will shoot you if I have to.

ADAM
Let me watch.

JOSEPH
What are you talking about?

ADAM
You go. I'll watch. I can't explain, I just think it'll be easier that way. If I watch this one then I'll be able to do the next one. I know I will. Come on, you know it's got to be easier than shooting me.

Joseph agreed. Easier to shoot the stranger, half dead anyway and possibly carrying the plague, than shoot his colleague in cold blood there in that little room. And that was the only option. Adam knew this. He told the court he knew this is how it would happen. Much was made, in the media, of his cold-blooded calculations.

EXAMINER: Is that what you think? Do you think it was cold-blooded?

At last, a question Anaximander could answer fully. This was her area of expertise.

ANAXIMANDER: There are two ways of interpreting what happened next, although Adam himself insisted that the version he gave at the time of his arrest is all there is to know.

He sat in the watchtower, and trained his sights on the shooting site, as per the manual. He watched Joseph arrive at the laser gun and line up the small vessel. He had never seen a kill before and while a part of him wanted to look away, he could not deny the grisly fascination. He watched Joseph closely, observed the entering of the security code and the arming of the laser. And then, following procedure, Adam checked the viewing screen, to ensure the inhabitants of the craft posed no immediate danger to his colleague. And so again he looked into her eyes, and this time he couldn't look away. She was sixteen years old, only a year younger than he was, but aged by three months at sea; out of food and water, thin and close to death.

Adam zoomed in on her face. Surveillance records confirm this. He saw her expression: confused, uncomprehending, only dimly taking in the great barrier, the fatal end of her journey.

Adam said it came to him as a flash, a realisation. He told the authorities that he did not make the decision to fire, but rather heard the report of his gun echo through the small room. He looked to the laser mount,

and saw his colleague slumped forward, a burn hole in the back of his head.

Immediately a message from control crackled through. By this time Adam was panicking.

'Gunshot recorded. Please report. Please report.'

'This is Adam. Joseph is dispatched. We have a small vessel at the fence. There's a girl on board. Joseph hesitated, Sir.'

'You're sure it's a single passenger?'

'Yes, Sir.'

'You need to finish this, Adam.'

'I know, Sir.'

'Report back when it is done. We'll send in a substitute. Congratulations, Adam. The Republic thanks you.'

'Thank you, Sir.'

Adam knew time was against him. They would be waiting for the laser discharge.

He raced past his fallen colleague and scrambled down the narrow track towards the ocean. He could see the small boat, adrift and in danger of bumping against a mine. Adam waved to get the girl's attention. He had no idea if she could hear him or even if they spoke the same language.

'Can you swim?' he called. 'Can you swim?'

She looked at him, but said nothing. She was too distant for him to make out the expression on her face.

He called again. 'You have to get out of the boat. Swim that way. Swim north!' He pointed. 'I'll come and meet you, further along. There's a place where I can get you through. A small gate. Wait at the gate. Whatever you do, don't touch

the buoys. Can you understand me? I have to destroy your boat. Please, wave if you understand me.'

He watched, waiting desperately for a response. Nothing. He waved again. She waved back, a small ambiguous gesture. Hoping against hope that she had heard him, Adam clambered back to the shooting station. The laser was still armed. He pushed Joseph aside and checked the sight. He could no longer see the girl. Had she understood his instructions, or simply slumped forward in exhaustion? There was no way of telling. He fired, and watched the hiss of steam and bubbling of water as the small craft was vaporised.

Adam called the watchtower. The communication was sombre; his voice was shaking. 'This is Adam, watchtower 621N. Task complete. Vessel destroyed.'

'Congratulations, Adam. The substitute will be there in ten minutes. Stay where you are. We will deal with the body.'

'Thank you, Sir.'

But Adam didn't stay where he was. All along the sea fence there were small service gates. They worked off a remote locking device and theoretically could only be opened with simultaneously entered codes: one from the service technician on the site, the other from the central control at defence headquarters.

Adam knew the system could be overridden, although at first he insisted it was simply a case of a malfunctioning gate. There has been much controversy about how he got this information, but it is worth remembering that Adam was curious and clever, and I do not find it difficult to

believe that he picked up information during his training that would not come the way of a normal Soldier.

Others have noted Adam's popularity with women, and in a society where all relationships were to be conducted covertly, it is entirely possible that he came by his information in this way. Most fancifully, some historians have noted that Rebekah, his friend from wrestling, went on to become an expert in electronic security. Some have speculated that the two may have stayed in touch, although no evidence of this ever emerged.

Whatever the method, Adam was able to open the service gate. He ran along the rocky shore, and swam out to the fence. This was by no means a simple task. Even though the sea was unusually calm that day, the gates were placed on the most inaccessible stretches of the fence-line.

Adam said that at first he thought he was too late. The girl was clinging to the other side of the fence, but she had sunk into the water and her head was down. He told us about the moment she looked up, their eyes meeting through the mesh. He described dragging her through the gate and swimming her back to the shoreline. She didn't speak, but now—as a result of her not being in the boat—he knew she understood him.

He took her to a small cave in the base of a cliff, where she could be safely hidden. He gave her a ration bar from his belt, and promised to return. She leaned back against the stones, and before she closed her eyes, she smiled her thanks to him. Or at least, this is how he told it.