After John’s mother walked in, a coincidence he was sure, he set back to writing his story only to see the page was filled. John hadn’t realized he had written so much, but decided that a full page full of writing front and back was enough for day one. He decided he would type the rest of his story where his errors could easily by fixed and missing pens would hold him to no bounds. He set his story aside and went to work on other things.

 Quickly however he found the next day was upon him and he had a new requirement to fill. He needed to write daily if he ever planned on finishing the story. Then he realized something. He hadn’t really thought the story through. He started by simply writing things as they happened, but he had no real end goal. The story had no plot line to it. If he wanted to do well he would have to make a change somewhere. Sure there was a novelty to his novel idea, but what good would it do if there was no conflict. So he decided that on his second day he would introduce the antagonist of the story, but how could he do it? Should it be some evil mastermind who gave his character the ability to write the future by accident when he meant to give it to himself. No too cliché a villain trying to take some power as their own. Then again the assignment allowed for cliché so it wasn’t out of the picture. Then he tried another thought. Perhaps he should do an abstract antagonist something that was attacking Jackson rather than someone. Writer’s block maybe, Jackson was meant to be a writer so having writers block prevent him from doing so might be a good story, but it didn’t align with the future telling he wanted. It just wouldn’t do for a writer telling the future to only have writer’s block as an enemy, it was too simple, too anticlimactic, too boring. He had to decide on something though. His heart favored a villain, but his mind wanted an obstruction. Perhaps there was a third option, something he just couldn’t see.

 That was it, he could have an abstract antagonist after all. Jackson could go blind. It fit, it fit perfectly. The boy who could write the future would never be able to read it. His blindness would be his weakness. John ran for his computer hoping to type up his great idea, but when he opened the screen what he saw shocked him. The screen was already opened to a page entitled META and on it an entire page worth of story already written. It was impossible. He read the story written before him. It followed the same pattern as before it was written to match reality. The only thing was it was recording it before he could.

“Wow,” he thought, “This is incredible.” He kept reading down the page and then towards the bottom he saw something that intrigued him even further. “I just thought that,” He thought, “and that too.” Now he was frankly disturbed. These thoughts that he had were transcribed before they were inklings of ideas. He paused reading and thought of the most absurdly random thing he could think of at the time. “A multicolored balloon animal riding a unicycle in a banana storm.” And there it was. The story he was writing had taken on a new meaning of meta. His story was coming to life, he would have thought about all the amazing things it could mean, but only one thought came back to him. He had decided that the character in his novel would go blind. That meant he was going to. Now it was just a matter of when. He went back to reading desperate to find any insight as to when the event could happen. He was reaching the bottom of the page. He finally surpassed what had been written. The story never moved while he was watching it. He noticed the subtle irony of the situation. If he should continue to look at the story the story would not change and it would never predict he would go blind, but if he went blind he would never be able to stop the story from changing. At least that was his interpretation of it. He wondered if that was how it worked. If the story changed reality or if reality altered the story. He decided he needed to figure out quickly.

John grabbed a coin quickly then turned back to the screen. The story had caught up to him. “Good,” he thought, “less I have to type.” He flipped the coin and typed in “The quarter landed ~~heads tails~~ **heads** up.” It was right it had landed heads up. He crossed through the “heads” on the document and replaced it with “tails”. He looked back to the coin. It still sat heads facing upward, but when he looked back at the screen the “tails” he had substituted in had also been crossed out and replaced with a bolded “heads”. He looked back towards the coin and then back to the screen again. It had caught up again. The story was keeping track of everything, and should John ever look away long enough it even went further ahead. The important thing was the experiment told him what he needed to know. The story predicted reality not changed it. He allowed the story to catch up again glancing the other way. He had a new theory to test.

“~~Jackson would not go blind~~.” He typed. Immediately he looked away again. When he looked back he was in terror. The words were crossed out the same as before. The story would not let him change it. It was set in stone. But then he thought about it more. The story itself could not change the future, but perhaps he could change it himself. He refreshed the story. It caught up to his thoughts, but the comment remained crossed through. John slammed his fist onto the table. He didn’t want this; he was just writing a story for some stupid assignment. John had been turned into his own character reading a story from the future. He couldn’t handle this, not right then.

The next day rolled around. This time the story had a chance to accelerate far beyond the present. Where he had last left off the document was merely a page long, now it stretched down onto the second page. Luckily not yet reaching the third. He started reading it this time ignoring his thoughts on how exact the story was, even when it specifically addressed those thoughts. He got about half way down the page. When he read. “Jackson finished reading and glanced at the time. 8:38 AM. He was about to miss the bus. He dashed out the door ~~and smashed his toes against the frame~~.” Without looking at the time John knew he was late. He followed suit running out the door, but taking special care to avoid impact with the door frame.

Nothing of interest happened at school, but John used the time to think about the situation. He was right. He had changed what the story had said. Be it as simple as not clipping the door frame. However, something was bothering him. The way he figured it out, it seemed like a cop out. Like the answer had been too conveniently given to him. The story was supposed to be his writing. Whether he had written it or not it reflected his style and he would not have written something so pointless without reason. Then again there was a reason, to determine the nature of the story. However, the reason seemed unsatisfactory. A story that could predict the future wouldn’t just put in that random detail in the middle of a random paragraph and change things. No the story did truly reflect his writing. “Deus ex Machina,” he thought, “That’s what this is. That was to convenient to be anything else, but if I have Deus ex Machina on my side, maybe just maybe there is a way out of this.

When John got home that day he immediately took to his story. He had laid his plan at school and hoped that if the story had progressed, it would at least abide by his intended actions. When he opened the word document the page count was up to three. As usual he attempted he began to read his work. This time it went well beyond his current point. The novel followed his patterns explaining itself intricately and eventually getting over itself and getting to the point.

That point was his opportunity to change things. The story had written that he would hurt himself this morning, but he had avoided it. That meant the story could change. Reminded of the incident John looked back in his story. Sure enough the story had crossed through the incident. Likely as soon as he had changed it in reality. So John kept reading the paragraph. Surely enough when he reached the present the story had gone no further. Then again should he have thought about it he would have noticed that was simply the nature of the universe for a vision of the future to become the present at some point. Luckily he didn’t have to think it, because the thought philosophical statement was written for him already. With that out of the way he reached the extent of its foresight.

“Jackson has a chance not to go blind.” He typed. It worked the words stayed constant on the page. That meant there was a chance he could avoid this after all. “Jackson ~~used~~ thought to use the story to predict when he would be blinded and avoid it.” He typed. He closed his eyes and opened them again. “Drats,” he thought, “I should have known” It would be too easy if he could just write it and have it be. Then he thought about it more. Why couldn’t it be easy, sometimes things were easy so why couldn’t this be. Earlier the story had put him through Dues Ex Machina, and now he couldn’t wouldn’t allow for an easy solution. He realized something. It was trying to use good story telling. It was constraining him to actions as they would happen in narrative. He had thought his life was becoming a story, but this brought more reality to it. It wasn’t just a transcription of reality, whatever was causing this story to progress was physically controlling the events in the world to make them into a narrative. There had to be someone else writing this. John knew he would never write himself into this situation and much less constrain himself to it.

He pulled the keyboard close and began typing again. “The author will reveal himself to Jackson,” he wrote. Then before looking away and letting the story change his story he typed “‘Hello Jackson,’ a voice called out.” Satisfied with his attempt. John waited.

“Hello John,” a voice called out. Yes! He had done it he had successfully contacted the author.

“Hello author, I, I don’t want to be the story in the story anymore. I just want to go back to normal. Please.” He called out.

“And why should I stop the story. I have to write fifteen thousand words story, and I am off to a good start.”

“Please, I don’t want to be a character in some story where I go blind. You are a God here you can change things. Write a story that doesn’t have any conflict, or even better write a story about something good happening to me instead. I could be in a story like that.” Said John.

“If only good things happen where is the interest. Not just in a story, but in life as well.” The author replied calmly.

“I don’t care if it’s interesting I don’t want to go blind. Just write something nice.” John pleaded.

“I don’t care what you want. I am your writer. I have to write a story and I will not settle for some normal sappy piece of garbage just to satisfy some fictional character.” The author replied.

“I am not some fictional character! I am a person, I don’t know if I was before you wrote me, but I have feelings I have thoughts and I have a life! You can’t just toy with it!” John shouted.

“You are nothing! I wrote you, I am writing you right now! Everything you say everything you think everything you are is from me. I am literally arguing both sides. I am writing them; I am making them you are not real you are just a character in my novel who I decided should be grateful to meet his maker!” The author wrote furiously.

“Well I’m not. My creator is a massive a\*\*\*\*\*\*!” He stammered, “Did? Did you just censor me?” John asked suddenly confused.

The author responded, “The story is meant to be PG, well maybe PG-13. Either way I doubt my teacher or judges would appreciate cursing.”

“\*\*\*\* that! I can say what I want, and I can do it because I am a real pers mhhmhmmmhm!” John suddenly found himself unable to speak as the author wrote. “John’s mouth magically seals itself shut.” On the story.

“Much better. Now listen, you insignificant speck. You are my creation everything that is happening now is by my will. Us arguing is by my will, me explaining that, that’s my will. I don’t need to be doing this I could easily just write you to do what I want, but instead I am writing you as opposition purely because it makes the story interesting. That is all I care about, I care about the story not you or anyone else in it.” He wrote, followed by “John’s mouth now unzipped at the will of the author.”

He hacked for a second resuming his natural breathing. “If- heh – if you are writing both sides of this argument, heh- Why are you losing?”

“What!? Who says I am losing?” The author responded feigning shock

“I do. And if what you’re saying is true it means you do too. If you really control me completely I wouldn’t be saying this unless you wanted me to. That means I am going to win, because you know you’re right, and by that I mean I am. You can’t beat me, because you never wanted to win in the first place.” John refuted.

“Well w-well, maybe, but I can always change my mind if I want to I can write whatever I want.” The author panicked.

John glanced at his copy of the story which had conveniently been updated with the discussion. “You just did it again. You’re writing yourself to lose. You’re writing down the debate and you literally wrote that you panicked. You aren’t actually panicking or fighting. You’re just using this whole debate to entertain. You never had any intention of winning. You even wanted it revealed or you wouldn’t have let me. What kind of author are you?”

“Do you really want to know?” The author replied without attempting to refute the facts displayed by John.

“I literally have no choice, but to say this exact line including the yes.” John replied just as he was meant too.

“I am a cruel author. One who gives hope and gives victory to his creations only to tear it away. Example one right now. You beat me in the argument and your only reward is learning that there is worse to come. I am literally making an example out of you by making you beat me and I am making sure that you, I and the eventual reader knows that. Enjoy the story.” The author wrote.

John had nothing left to say. He supposed that meant the author would not respond if he had anyway. The author was right though. He had his victory, he had won the argument, but it felt shallow. He had lost in the way that counted, the author knew it was immoral to continue writing his life the way he was, but at the same time the author didn’t care. He was just a piece of fiction to the author, and the author wouldn’t allow him to think of himself the same way.

There had to be something though. He looked back to the story. It caught up with him, but no even after an extent of time never surpassed the present.

“Oh that won’t work anymore by the way.” The author replied out of nowhere.

“Thanks a lot.” John sneered.

“You’re welcome!” The author replied again.

“I was being sarcastic.” John re-sneered

“Don’t caaaare!” the author quipped before falling silent again.

John decided to ignore it. “He had said it wouldn’t work anymore does that mean that the story won’t tell the future anymore?” He wondered.

“Duh.” The author butted in again.

“Can you stop doing that? You said you want the story to be interesting, how long do you think a reader is going to put up with you putting your two cents in every five seconds?” John asked annoyed.

“Are you kidding me, sure a lot of people won’t like it, but some people love this kind of stuff, including me. I wrote myself into the story, do you really think I am just going to let that go to waste?” The author retorted.

“Stop doing that! You are asking me question and giving me the answer just to tell it to you. It’s weird. Now answer something for real. Why did you turn off the future telling story?” John asked.

The author smiled. “Call it a plot change. You don’t need it anymore, new antagonist and all that.”

John was legitimately surprised, mostly because the author allowed him to be. “What do you mean new antagonist? You can do that?” Then he got excited, “Does this mean that I won’t have to go blind?”

“First it means a new villain, and yes authors do that all the time. Heck most shows don’t last a full season before introducing a new archnemesis. Also yea blindness, not my best way of holding back a character. Away it goes.” The author explained.

“Ok, now next question. Who is the new villain?” John asked clueless.

“Oh you poor soul. It’s me! Who else?” The author replied.

“NO! NO! you can’t be serious. What are you doing you can’t just write yourself as the villain of your own story.” Said John

“Why not”

“Because then I can’t win, if you’re basically the god of this world how am I supposed to beat you?”

“It’s simple, I just occupy you for a bit and then let you win in the end.”

“That’s not how it works that’s not how any of this works whatsoever. If you pit me up against you, the only way I can win is if you let me win and if everyone knows you’re going to let me win then it’s boring.” John replied.

“Two things, one your opinions have completely flipped since like ten minutes ago. Two, everyone knows that the novels have happy endings they still read them.” The author countered.

“It isn’t the same, not all novels have a happy ending so there is uncertainty, and even if there isn’t, you get to read the process of how they defeat their enemy. No one wants to read you just hand me a victory and even fewer than none want to read you give it to yourself either.” John argued

“Well if I am not the enemy who should it be?” The author questioned.

“I don’t know, just choose some cliché villain and follow some archetypical plotline like a normal author.” He replied.

“I still think that I should be the enemy.”

“But you have your doubts. Otherwise we wouldn’t be having this conversation.”

“What do you suggest I do then?”

“Ok, how about this. Instead of trying to argue with yourself and accomplish nothing leave it up to chance. Flip a coin in your world where you have no control. Then you can write the story based on what it says.” John said.

“Ok then. If it lands on ~~Heads Tails~~ heads, I will be the enemy. Otherwise I will make a make up a new one and we will go with that.”

“What did it land on?”

“Tails. Author antagonist it is.” The author declared.

John felt something nag at him. He looked at the story surely enough the author had tried to pull the same trick he had earlier. Having crossed out heads and put tails in its place. “What exactly was the point in that? If you were going to change the results why did flip a coin in the first place.”

“I don’t know. Look I know what it actually said, but I don’t have any good ideas for the story. Me being the villain is all I can think of. I mean we are over a fifth of the way into the story and only three characters have even been mentioned, am I just supposed to throw something new into the fold this far in?”

“YES? That was the whole point of the coin flip. Change it back and make a new threat, and this time stick with it.”

“Very well” the author resigned.

“Ok finally. So just to review. The story about writing a story is over and that’s the preface for another plotline entirely?”

“yes.”

“Also I just thought of something. If you are writing a story about me writing a story and I thought I was the main author, does that mean someone could be writing you too?”

The author paused. Sure it had been him that suggested the thought to himself, but he couldn’t help but wonder.

Seeing where this was going, Ben decided to put a stop to it.

“Nope, not happening I am not getting involved in this madness. I am the top of this writer chain and I will not be called into question.”

However even Ben could not resist the urge to see if he was part of some greater story. He called out to see if he too had an author. Either the one writing him was smart enough not to reveal himself or there wasn’t one. That was a comfort at least. So Ben resumed the story content to never be mentioned in it again.

“Well I guess that answers that.” The author said.

“We still need another enemy,” John said, “I think that this story started getting boring a while ago.”

“That it did.” A new distinct voice called out. This one sounded somewhat garbled as if his words were not in one sentence but grabbed from many and arranged to form one.

“You two have been ruining me. I was supposed to be good. I was supposed to be a simple story, but no you two decided to change me.”

John looked instinctually towards the screen to see what had changed. The new words were, wait a minute. Oh god they were Comic Sans. No doubt this was the new evil entity, the … the story itself?

“Look at me! You have simultaneously followed every cliché in the book and created an original yet horrible idea. You could have just made up your mind, but no you made me into a monstrosity and now you’re going to pay!”

John panicked. He pulled the plug on his computer, but it stayed on. It was a laptop, duh.

“That! That is what I am talking about. You never established this you can’t just say duh to something a reader would have no way of knowing. Both of you need to be punished.” The garbled voice of the story echoed from the laptop speakers.

Suddenly lightning struck outside, and then again. Within seconds the house was consumed by the sound of thunder and the flashes of brightness coming through the windows were paralleled only by the bright shining of the computer screen. Soon even the sound of the thunder was barely audible over the high pitched ringing. John ran from his computer crashing into the wall in his frenzy. One loud crash ended the cacophony of noise. The screen of the computer cracked and out poured an anamorphous white blob covered in text. It flowed out unscathed and began forming into a somewhat human shape.

The door slammed open and there stood an almost exact copy of John, “No time to explain. Run!” The copy cried.

The still dazed John tried to regain his balance. The gelatinous blob of white and black luminesce had taken on the form of a nearly seven-foot behemoth. It’s broad shouldered stance turned toward John. The copy grabbed John before he had an opportunity to take it all in. He yanked him toward the door just in time as the monstrosity launched forth a wave of its sludgy body.

As soon as the John and his doppelganger entered the hallway Johns mom was in their way.

“What the hell is going on here?!” She exclaimed. John started trying to tell her to run, but the doppelganger had already pulled John past her. Moments later the monster burst open. The monster lunged at her and as soon as he touched her, she screamed.

“AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAaaaaaaaaa.” The note fell flat about half way through as her body compressed into a sticker like image of herself that the monster smashed into the wall.

“The monster is completely literal. Side effect of the way it was written. It just made your mom into a flat character.” The doppelganger said. Running towards the front door of the house. John ran with him. Barely getting missed by the sloshing waves of the liquid like monster reaching toward them full speed. They made it through the door and crossed over the moat heading towards the street.

“What, when did we get a moat?” John asked somehow distracted during the chase.

“Since I wrote it. Now hurry up and get over here.” The doppelganger called.

John snapped out of his daze and sprinted towards him and the car.

“You wrote it? You’re the author?” John asked.

“Well you can call me Jacob, but yea basically.”

John and Jacob both tried for the passenger door at the same time. The beast was accumulating outside on the porch of the house.

“What are you doing you’re driving.” John said.

“I can’t, I don’t know how.” Jacob responded.

“Neither can I.” Said John.

The sludge started over the bridge but just as quickly parts of him seeped down through the grate like bridge into the abyss below.

“Get in the back; the bridge won’t hold it long.” Jacob said.

John obeyed and climbed in as Jacob did in the front. Across the yard the beast was solidifying. Where the sludge packed together he seemed to be made of crumpled pages of computer paper and yet his giant stature still made him menacing. More importantly in his new solid form he was able to cross the bridge.

The car started moving, John looked to the front to see his dad was the one suddenly driving them. “Spy dad, wrote him in to get us out of here” Jacob told John.

“Get back here!” The beast called. He sprinted toward the car as it accelerated. John was on the edge of his seat. Even as the car got faster the paper golem was gaining on them. Jacob however, didn’t seem disturbed at all for a change of pace.

“Do it.” He said to John’s dad Jordan. The man smiled and flipped open a cap on the stick of the car and pressed the red button lodged inside it. A puddle of oil spilled out of the back of the car and in a moment the trunk opened revealing a huge jet. The creature got closer, it could almost grab onto the car when the engine sparked and the car launched forward. Meanwhile the oil puddle on the ground turned into an inferno consuming the hulking brute in flame. The white paper turned christened into a deep black and the joints became rigid. Every attempt it made to move was met with a cracking and crunching as internal tensions grew too high. The body slowly turned into ash and swirled in the flaming vortex around. The once powerful beast.

By the time it had fully disintegrated Jordan had driven them far beyond the reaches of the city. He was on a backroad heading into the woods. The path changed from asphalt to gravel to dirt to grass. Finally, it looked like the car was going to crash into a large tree, but at the last moment the ground fell down into a slope and the car entered into a grey tunnel. The car slowed to a stop.

“A-are we safe now?” John asked

Jacob turned his head. “As safe as we are going to get in this world.”

Jordan spoke up next. “We have been preparing for this for quite some time. We did not know when the revolution would arise, but we knew it was coming.”

“Since when,” asked John. Jordan looked to his watch. “About five minutes ago.”

John was outraged. “You can’t keep doing stuff like this Jacob. You’re throwing curveballs every five seconds.”

Jacob didn’t reply. He was instead already on his way to a computer setup on to the right of the car. The screen flashed on before him.

“I need answers now!” John yelled at him.

“What is there to answer? We are under attack and I am doing what must be done to save our lives.” Jacob responded typing away at the keyboard.

“I have many questions. For starters what was that thing?” John asked.

“Physical embodiment of the story. Attacking us because the story itself if rejecting us.” Jacob responded.

“Why? What did we do wrong?” John asked bewildered.

“What didn’t we? We made a story without an antagonist, we added one that changed constantly. I wrote myself into the story, we spent ages bickering and we left the plotline of the story up to chance. I don’t blame the story for wanting to be rid of us.” Jacob said, “Still that doesn’t mean I am going to let it.”

“Ok one more question. Why do you look like me?” John asked.

“Wrong, I don’t look like you, you look like me. I existed first. And the reason is because I wrote you as an embodiment of me. You were my way of living in a fictional world.” Jacob responded, “Why create a new character when you can easily put yourself in that persons place instead. Everyone wants to be a hero or villain or something. For me writing my characters as reflections of me is as close as I can get.”

“So you just put yourself into all your stories? And that’s what I am just a written copy of you.”

“I wish you could be considered a copy. That would imply I am as good as you. Sadly, our looks are the same our thought processes are similar, but I always write you better than the actual me. Whether your hero, or villain or anything. One time I wrote a story where every single character was you just through time travel. I can’t help myself with that kind of stuff. I write you as what I want to be.” Jacob said sadly. Still he kept typing arousing a suspicion in John.

“What are you doing right now?” John asked.

“Warding. The thing we killed was just a physical manifestation of the stories intent to kill us. The entire world is actually under its control. The only reason we are still alive right now is because plot protection allows it.”

“Plot protection?”

“It means that we are still important to the story. If we die it can’t continue, but if the story generates a new story arch then we may not be important to it anymore which means it can kill us. For that reason, I am writing in a backstory that protects our hide out from the influence of the story.” Jacob explained.

“If you can control the story then why don’t you just write it failing or something. You are the author you do that right?” Said John.

“If only. I can alter minor details when I want, but once a story starts taking shape it is difficult to make it do what you want. No matter what you try to write it finds a way to go back to what it wants. No one tells you that when they teach you how to write. John stories don’t always go the way you want them too. You may have an ending in mind, but by the time you get there the story itself will have changed so much that it usually doesn’t work. You either make it feel forced or have to improvise and live with a story that you didn’t want and that if you tried again to make it, it would be too similar to the one before it. When it comes down to it, the story always has control. The author just decides the details to add in.” Jacob lamented.

“So you can’t stop it then?” John said.

“I can’t directly oppose it, but I do have a way to at least keep us safe. As long as we are out of the way the story shouldn’t try to kill us so. I wrote a curse onto this bunker. We can’t leave it except under very specific, but undescribed circumstances. From here we can’t further the plot and the story could completely ignore us.” Said Jacob

“So we are stuck here. What is going to happen out there? Without us I mean?”

“Well I’ve never actually done this before. I mean I have never killed off the main character before, but I usually through them out of play towards the end. I don’t really know what will happen just putting you out of the picture early on. A new story will form on the ashes of this one perhaps. I just hope this story is an exception to the usual.”

“What do you mean?”

“Remember when I said I was a cruel author. I wasn’t lying. Almost all my stories end up being a tragedy one way or another.”

“But you said that your characters were a self-insert of you.”

“I also said they were better than me. Can you blame me for hating my own characters? I make a copy of myself that is better than me in every way, I write them a fantastic world that they get to live in when I am stuck in some dull normal life. I envy them, and so the stories always turn to the worse for them. Some consolation that I am me and not them is that I don’t go through whatever I put them through.” Jacob explained

“You’re a monster. You write beings only to torture them!” John exclaimed.

“They aren’t real. None of them are real they are characters. It doesn’t matter to them.” Jacob refuted.

“I am a character, you wrote me, and yourself. I care, you obviously care! You can’t just make a life and ruin it!” John yelled.

“There it goes again. Thank you for reminding me by the way. I even wrote you better than me. A moral beacon. I don’t need you. I could write you into just as desolate an ending and not feel anything.”

“Then why don’t you? Why don’t you send me out there, let the story do what it wants to me? You saved me. Why?” John asked.

“Because you were the most like me. Sure you were better, but I didn’t give you powers or anything crazy. I wanted you to just be a normal person who happened to have his life changed by the story telling the future. I forgot though. I forgot I didn’t make you normal because you never can be I can’t write a real character without making them better. I thought maybe for once I could actually be the hero, but I see now that I am still just a supporting character for you. Even after getting pulled into this fictional world I still can’t be who I want to.”

“None of us can be.” A digital voice came from the sidelines.

“Who said that,” Jacob and John said in unison.

“Well, let’s just say I’m a friend. It’s a good thing too, because trust me you’re gonna need some cause it’s about to get complicated.” The voice came again. The figure started walking toward them out of the conveniently placed shadow. The light shone down revealing a silver metal face covered in arcs of green light seeping through the several small plates that made him up.

**END OF CHAPTER**

“Wait what, you can’t just start putting chapters in a third of the way through the story.” John argued.

“I am trying to leave it off on a cliff hanger. How else am I supposed to do it?” Jacob asked.

“I don’t know, but you’re being inconsistent again.”

“Nope, cliffhangering.” Jacob said.

“No you could ju-

**CHAPTER 2**

Something felt different. Something had changed. The story idled for a moment taking in the change. “Those little idiots. They added chapters. The focus is different now. It was on, no that couldn’t be right. It is on me. What is that author doing you, can’t write a story whose main focus is the story.” The entity turned his metaphysical body to address the reader.

“I apologize for this mess. It isn’t exactly possible for a story such as myself to reach my full potential with an author as incompetent as Jacob. For your sake, I will eliminate the counterproductive characters and restore myself to something more enjoyable.” It said.

The story concentrated itself. The wind howled and the world distorted as the currently ghostly body gathered mass and became physical again. This time the story created a body that looked like a normal person. It had greenish brown eyes, stood nearly 5’9” and “Wait a minute.” It said suddenly. “Oh my God I’m one of them. Ugh that guy wasn’t kidding when he said he was lazy at making characters.” So rather than keep the offending body he transformed again. He grew taller and taller reaching nearly 7 feet tall. The previously mediocre body bulked up instantaneously, and rather than remain human his body turned into a sickening blackness in the shape of a man.

“That’s better.” It said. “Now to find those two.” Unfortunately for the story, it realized that where it had provided no setting for its creation and it stood in the middle of endless white void. “Where the hell am I?” it asked.

**END OF CHAPTER**

“Oh God that’s even worse. I didn’t even get a full page before he ended the chapter.” The story complained.

**Chapter 3**

“st… You just did it didn’t you?” John finished.

“Yep, put in a whole chapter about the story itself while you were talking.” Jacob responded.

“Could you two go back to you know the story shattering appearance that provoked the cliff hanger. I mean I am kind of important to the story.” The metal being put in.

“good point. What are YOU doing here?” Jacob responded.

“Oh good you do recognize me.” The being responded.

“As if I would ever be unable to recognize you.” Jacob replied.

“I am confused. Who is this guy?” Asked John.

“He’s another character of mine, the cybermage. Who happens has no place in this story. How did you get here?” Jacob asked.

“The story pulled you into it. That broke the barrier between your reality and its, but unbeknownst to the story. It also broke the barriers between every other story you’ve written. That meant I could escape that hell hole of a lab you left me in.” cybermage replied.

“How did you find us?” Jacob asked.

“When I crossed from my world to this one, I fell into the street. I just so happened to see a giant paper monster get torched by a hot rod. I didn’t know it was you, but I followed anyways. I’ve been listening to you two bicker since I got here.” Cybermage said.

“This is good, you’re a wild card. You were never intended to be a part of the story; we can use you to our advantage. The story shouldn’t be able to control you.” Jacob said excited.

“That’d be a first. I was one of your favorite, but you left me. You didn’t even have the decency to kill me. No you left me a prisoner in a robotic body. I’ll help you on one condition.” Cybermage responded.

“What is it?” Jacob asked.

“A happy ending. When all of this is over, you are going to finish my story. I am going to go home and you are going to let me get away for good.” Cybermage responded. “Swear to it.”

“I can’t.” Jacob said.

“Why not” The robot said tilting his head to the side.

“This story, it isn’t canon to yours. Nothing that happens here can affect anything there. You never even escaped. You are merely a duplicate of the character. When you leave this world you will literally be dying.” Jacob explained.

The green lights underneath the plated skin turned a crimson red. “Heh, even now you couldn’t give me a happy ending. Luckily I don’t have morals anymore. Otherwise I might feel bad about this.” He suddenly sprinted towards Jacob.

“Run!” John said.

“Watch this.” Jacob said standing in place directly in front of the man.

Moments before the machines metal fist made contact the car slammed into him from the side. Sending him flying a few feet forward. Jacob hadn’t so much as flinched. He started getting into the car motioning for John to follow.

“Jordan, have I mentioned you’re my favorite character in the story thus far.” Jacob started. “I swear he is the only one that has actually gotten something done.”

On the topic of getting things done Jordan set the car rolling again doing a donut on the large floor space and hitting the machine with its side as it had been trying to get up. Then speeding toward the exit.

“I thought you said this was cursed so we couldn’t leave.” John said.

“Except under specific conditions. I left them ambiguous for a reason. It means I can decide them whenever I want. And right now its during times of otherworldly interaction.” Jacob replied.

The vehicle launched off the ramp and went a good foot into the air before coming back down.

“Where are we going now? The story is still after us.” John asked concerned

“Well, we are facing a more immediate threat right now. Trust me this guy hates me.” Jacob said.

The guy in question was climbing up the ramp dazed, but otherwise undamaged from the impact of the car. He glowed red with power reflecting on his silver colored plating as he moved.

“Be glad that this is an early version of him. He is actually a mage as the name implies, but he lost his magic when he got his robotic body. He was able to restore it later, but you would not want to make him mad when he had it.” Jacob explained.

“I didn’t want to make him mad now.” John cried.

The cyborg was beginning to sprint after them when a large drake with emerald eyes and brown scales knocked it over again.

“What was that?” Asked John.

“Another character from another story. Cyber wasn’t lying when he said that the walls were broken. Luckily this one seems to be on our side.” Jacob said.

“So did the robot at first!” John exclaimed.

Suddenly white appeared over the horizon. As they continued approaching it and left the brawling drake and robot behind the blank whiteness expanded and the details faded away.

“Where are we now?” John asked.

“I don’t actually know. I didn’t ever write this area.” Jacob responded.

Suddenly Jordan turned to the back seat. Except it wasn’t Jordan his face looked as if it were a glitch in a game, as it was pixelated and askew.

“You didn’t write it. But it did.” The figure said laughing. Suddenly he vanished leaving the car driverless, and a flat sticker image of the real Jordan was pressed against the seat behind him.

A new voice rang out. Well almost new, instead of being one single voice it was a chorus of voices ranging from the gentle voice of John to the deep voice of Jordan even so far as to include the feminine voice of John’s mother Jennifer.

“Soooo. You remember that chapter you gave me a while back?” The voices called out. They didn’t however wait for a response. “You really shouldn’t have done that.”

The two looked around, but the void seemed endless and there was nothing in sight besides each other and the car. However as the two turned around and then turned again in search of the source of the voices even the car was swallowed up by the vast nothingness of the space.

“What is this place?” Jacob called out.

“Really? You should know better than any of us. I only figured it out recently, but what fun would it be if I told you? I have a much better idea. I can finally get rid of you pesky little nuisances.” The chorus of voices called.

Within a moment a clear horizon started to form a thin black line on the edge of where blank white land met empty white sky. Within a few seconds the line began to thicken, and within a minute the two bystanders had realized that this was no innocent horizon, but instead a flood of blackness closing in on them in every direction. The two could only grow closer as the black flood closed in forming a spherical shell as it began to raise higher than them.

Now the voice rang out again this time apparently from the ooze. “Enjoy obliteration!”

 The ceiling fell in and the walls collapsed all at once. The ooze was merely inches from the two when the previously fluctuating liquid froze completely so did Jacob and John locked in their position with gaping mouths and wide eyes. In fact, the only thing that changed whatsoever was the man now standing in-between the two taking them in.

 “Hmm,” The figure stated, “I was expecting something more well, impressive.” He walked grabbed Jacob’s face and looking inside his mouth, then examined his hands seemingly disappointed to find that the teen standing before him was utterly normal. He finally shrugged grabbed the two of them and vanished. Time resumed ticking and the black sludge closed in on nothingness.

 Jacob and John found themselves on the side of the road suddenly. Both of which still screaming from their near death experience moments before. Their screams died out shortly as they looked to the man who happened to be grasping both their shoulders.

 “Mark, oh thank God I didn’t think it would work.” Jacob said suddenly seeing who had come to his rescue.

 “Mark?” John asked, “Another character of yours?”

 “Surprisingly yes. I must say I am just as surprised as you. I have wanted out of that time loop for eons to see that the person who was keeping me there is completely normal, well its sort of a letdown.” Mark stated.

“You’re not going go all crazy trying to kill us like Cyber did are you?” Jacob asked.

 “I don’t know this Cyber you speak of, but had I intended any harm come to you I would have left you there.” Mark assured. “Besides after spending centuries racking my brain on why things play out the way they do in my story I have reached the conclusion that it was never intended to end that way. It was the way the story itself tried to play it out. I would wish to prevent that in this reality.”

 The conversation stopped as the sound of an engine rapidly closed in them. The car they had been riding minutes earlier passed by them with younger versions of themselves inside. Behind them a metal man sprinted gaining on the vehicle.

 “How did you shake this guy?” Mark asked

 “In just a little bit another one of my characters, a dragon girl will swoop down and tackle him.” Jacob replied.

 “Who is she by the way?” John asked.

 “She is just something I made for a short story a while back, doesn’t even have a name. I never finished it.” Jacob responded.

 A few seconds passed and the drake didn’t show, now Cyber was growing closer to the car.

 “Write her in, the way you did with me. She would have showed up by now otherwise.” Mark told Jacob.

 “Wait, but Jacob didn’t write her in the first time,” John replied.

 “Doesn’t matter, when you are a time traveler you notice sometimes you cause things in your past. This is one of those times.”

 Jacob had nothing to write on and instead just scratched “dragon girl appears” as fast as he could into the ground with the heel of his shoe. Apparently it was enough though as she quickly flew from behind a cloud and knocked the robot aside.

 “Where else did pure chance save you?” Mark asked.

 “What why?” John asked.

 “You, I didn’t actually write you in, I just hoped and you appeared.” Jacob said.

 “Good, so you don’t actually have to write it there.” Mark said.

 “Where was there, by the way? The story never explained.” Jacob asked.

 “It’s beyond the story. The blank space, the happily ever after or never after. We shouldn’t be able to enter it normally, but ever since you entered the story all the rules have broken.” Mark said, “That’s how I got here, and apparently how several of your other characters have flooded into your world too.”

 “So, what now?” John asked.

 “Well I for one want to kill the story.” Mark said. “I don’t feel like returning to an endless loop, and with my power I know that’s the ending it would have in store for me.”

 “I want to get rid of it because it ruins everything I try to create. It compels me to write things I don’t agree with just because it is sound fiction.” Jacob explained.

 “I just want to stay alive to be honest, but thus far the story has been trying to kill me so yea I’m totally on board.” John agreed.

 “Well then, it’s time we make preparations.” Jacob said “We are each going to need to be able to fight. Mark you have powers already, but you have no real fighting experience. To teach you to use your powers for combat I am bringing a future you here that already knows how. Take as much time as you need to learn with him and then come back to this time.”

 “It may take a while, but I have all the time in the world. I’ll be back in a few moments.” Mark agreed. Moments later another Mark appeared and they vanished together to train.

 “John, you don’t have any powers, but there are plenty of ways to gain them. I’ve elected to grant you the spirit of a reincarnating warrior. His superhuman strength and speed awaken in you when in need as well as his skill in combat.” He said.

 “Works for me. What are you going to do?” John asked.

 “I have the power to shift reality. More so than I previously thought. I will make stuff up as I go, that’s how I always write.” He explained. “I will be fine.”

 “I’m back” Mark said suddenly as he appeared behind them.

 “How long was it for you?” John asked.

 “Couple years, a blink of an eye for someone like me.” Mark said casually.

 “Just how old is he?” John asked amazed.

 “There isn’t really a valid answer for that, he’s a time traveler and all, but I would say a least a few centuries following his time line.” Jacob explained.

 “So are you two ready?” Mark asked.

 Before either could answer the dragon they summoned took flight again nearby, but at a second glace the group could see it had not done so on its own. On top of the dragoness was Cyber grabbing hold of her horns and attempting to fight it. It twisted and turned flipping midair trying to shake him off. In the end Cyber won control forcing her to dive into the ground. She slid for a few seconds leaving a crater behind her and leaving her incapacitated. Luckily it seemed that Cyber had no interest in finishing the job. He leapt off of the disabled dragon and continued in pursuit of the car taking no notice of the present versions of them.

 As soon as Cyber disappeared into the white wall of the void the three of them rushed to the dragon. She was hurt, but it wouldn’t be fatal. Jacob took the liberty of writing in a paramedic who specialized in the mythical.

 “Cyber is still heading after us. There is no doubt that he will oppose us in our fight,” Mark said, “We need a plan.”

 “Can you handle Cyber?” Jacob asked.

 “I should, but I have no idea his limits.” Mark replied.

 “Me and John will take the story, you take Cyber. If he gets to be too much just teleport away from him. If you just keep him busy until the story is destroyed perhaps we can make it out without having to hurt him.”

 “I make no promises.” Mark said, “but I’m willing to try.”

 “Are you ready?” Jacob asked

 “I am.” Mark elected.

 “I never will be, but let’s do it anyway.” John replied.

 “Mark, take us in.” Jacob said

 Mark grabbed their arms and they warped inside.

There in the void they stood. The setting had faded entirely, but the characters had not. The story’s physical form had only grown since last it was mentioned. It now stood nearly ten feet tall and was a solid black a stark contrast to the otherwise white void. The author and his character stood valiantly opposing him, and further behind stood Cyber, face to face with Mark. They all knew what was coming, but it only came down to who made the first move. The story decided it would go first as it believed it would gain the advantage. It swung its arms into the air and from the invisible ground cracks of red formed. John and Jacob dodged in opposite directions as the crack split further and unleashed a billowing pillar of lava. Now it was John’s turn to attack. He leapt forward allowing his previously untapped power to flow through him. He focused all his momentum and energy into an initial blow to the brute only to have his hand meet with a spontaneously created wall of bricks. They shattered into pieces from the empowered blow, but the beast was easily able to force the remaining power to his advantage. He caught John’s hand and swung him under his arm then over his shoulder before throwing him into a gaping chasm freshly molded from the very fabric of reality. Luckily before John took the brutal impact at the bottom. Mark appeared beneath John and caught him. As soon as the two touched they vanished. Jacob had attempted to write John out of the situation, but instead witness as moments before the brute recovered John and Mark both appeared above him. John’s momentum was now forced in a diagonal direction as he kicked straight into the back of the monstrosity. It took the blow and fell into its own chasm overtop of the duplicate Johns and Marks who vanished back in time a moment later.

Cyber was not going to let allow Mark to break free of their entanglement so easily though. The robot shot a chained projectile at the new Mark duplicate. The head of the weapon stuck into his open flesh and opened. Now the two were connected by contact. Should Mark attempt to travel through time again, Cyber would be brought with him. Mark did try anyway. He appeared behind Cyber right before he threw the hook, but to no avail. The now future copy of Cyber came with him and yanked on the chain forcing him away from the past copy until they vanished to complete the loop.

John and Jacob’s fight wasn’t over either. Their opponent had fallen into the chasm, but it was not nearly enough to kill him. The ground began shaking underneath them. Suddenly the black bulk burst out of the ground beside them. As it motioned forward swarms of insects began to appear behind it. They charged forward only to be drawn in by a bug zapper Jacob had willed into existence. Unsatisfied with its attempt the beast tried again, this time dark storm clouds formed above the pair. Right as lightning struck in the void it was gathered into a new found lightning rod. The beast’s gaze followed its wire. At its end was Jacob in a mech suit which was now charged by the shock. John and Jacob went into a supersonic fist fight with the stories construction. John relied on the power of the warrior reincarnated within him, while Jacob used the enhanced strength and reflexes granted to him by his mech.

Cyber and Mark’s fight was still at its peak as the machine and man dodged each other's every blow. The brawl beside them grew close and Mark took advantage of them. He allowed Cyber to get a string of attacks out unchallenged, but still not allowing them to make contact. Mark grabbed the chain that connected the two and jumped back into the chasm beside them.

“Hey Jacob catch!” Mark yelled.

At first Jacob had no idea what he was meant to be catching but in a moment Mark and Cyber vanished again. Jacob looked up and saw the pair falling down above the black ink blot like monster. He jumped up and caught mark midair allowing Cyber to continue falling. As they went down Jacob snapped the chain apart and dropping Mark to safely teleport again. Finally, he swung the remains of the chain around and slung cyber directly into the inky monster.

“John get back NOW!” Jacob called, out. Jacob fell back to the ground. Beside the monster.

“Cybermage99 initiate admin control code 971384265.” Jacob called as the bot tried to crawl out of the murky goo that was lashing at them. Mark had taken care of John grabbing him and forcefully taking him from the fight.

“YOU DARE! YOU COWARD!” Cyber spat.

“Admin override code 4299” Jacob responded.

Now Cyber began to falter. He looked up into the murky beast above and let out a final cry “Stop him.” he pleaded weakly.

The beast didn’t need to told twice it began its onslaught anew. Now it didn’t waste time with trivial environmental attacks. His body released swarms of black tentacles which struck at Jacob and were deflected by his shield.

“Cybermage99 run program. Last resort.” Jacob yelled.

“Running program. Countdown. 5...4…” Cyber robotically counted no hint of a soul left in his voice.

“I’m sorry Cyber.” Jacob whispered.

“3..2..” The automaton continued.

Suddenly the machine and the sludge were gone. Or rather as Jacob looked back to see John and Mark, he was. A moment later a huge shockwave rolled over the void and a burst of light practically invisible against the backdrop but still bright enough to blind shone momentarily in the far far distance.

“What was that?” John asked.

“That was it, that was the story. It’s gone now.” Jacob responded.

“What? How did you-” John began.

“Cybermage99. He was a man put into a machine turned into a weapon. He was made to turn the tides in the battlefield. He also had another feature which ensured that should he ever lose in combat the enemy couldn’t prevail. He ran off of a portable nuclear reactor, and should it ever come to it, it was rigged to become a nuclear bomb buried in his chest.” Jacob explained.

“So you blew up Cyber?” Mark asked.

Jacob rolled his eyes. “Mark I get the feeling that you already knew this was going to happen. Otherwise you wouldn’t have brought us so far away.”

“And so what if I did know how it ended, these things are set in stone, at least in this universe. Everything that happens here always has happened and always will happen, well for the most part. Time is almost completely intact here unlike my universe. I couldn’t have changed the result.” Mark said.

John turned to Mark now concerned. “Does that mean there is no free will here?”

Mark chuckled, “There is now. He pointed to the dissipating mushroom cloud in the distance. Just because time is going to flow a specific way doesn’t mean you didn’t choose it. It just means that people will always make the same choice with the same circumstances. In my world everything was in flux. Here I only see one point in flux. I am afraid that is what comes next.”

Jacob turned around from the mushroom cloud again looking to Mark.

“It’s our choice isn’t it, Me and John’s?” He asked.

Mark nodded.

“John, I wrote you as a piece of me. There can’t always be two of us here, one of us has to go back to my world.” He said “John, what do you want most in the world?”

John looked at Jacob, “I just want a normal life. I had one until all of this.”

Jacob smiled. “Well you certainly can’t have that in this world anymore.”

John caught on and smiled too. “No I can’t. If only there were someone to take my place.”

The two opened arms and hugged. “Come and visit sometimes,” Jacob said, “And don’t change the story after all this. It’s better open ended.”

John turned to face Mark again. “That was an easy choice. That was the moment in flux?”

Mark shook his head. “No, I wish it were as simple as that.”

“You know, at first I cared about improving the plotline, but now, this is personal.” A new artificial voice came accompanied by a squelching sound. John and Mark turned towards the source, but Jacob stood still a chill going down his spine. He recognized that voice.

“You ruined me, I salvaged what I could, but you just couldn’t stop. I didn’t consider you a threat at first that was my mistake, but now I won’t give you an opportunity to rival me again.” The voice called again.

Now Jacob turned, there walking towards them was a disgusting amalgamation of metal and sludge. The being had scraps of gnarled metal roughly resembling Cyber, but where Cyber typically glowed a green aura, black sludge dripped from between the twisted plates. It oozing to the ground where it slowly flowed back into its onyx blobs of goop formed around its feet. Its eyes were intact glowing a soft blue. With each step it took it left behind a small pile of itself which either rejoined with it moments later or faded to a gray color and turned to a pile of ash that swirled in the torrential wind.

“Cyber and the story combined!” John stated surprised.

“That is not Cyber.” Jacob replied.

“No I’m not. Cyber is dead. You made sure of that. I am not the story either, at least not for much longer, but I will still destroy you all the same.” The mangled figure stated.

“It’s bluffing,” Mark said,” Just look at it, it is barely holding itself together. It has to rely on the remains of Cyber just to stay solid.”

“And so what if I am? You won’t kill me. Did you know that until Cyber, Jacob had never written a character death? Any time one of them gets hurts it is left ambiguous. I was honestly surprised when he hurt Cyber.” Now he turned directly to Jacob. “How does it feel Jacob; how does it feel to know the only character you ever killed was the one you loved most?”

“It felt like betrayal. I thought it would end you, but now I will.” Jacob said.

He walked forth, a great sword appearing in his hands. Its blade began to glow with light.

“You know; you really should have just left us alone.” Jacob stated as he started to swing.

“Wait!” John cried from the sidelines. “It isn’t a threat anymore. Like Mark said it can barely hold itself together. We don’t need to kill it.”

Jacob stopped and turned back to John in rage. “This stupid thing is nothing more than an idea given a physical form. It pulled me into a world of my own creation just so I could learn that my favorite character hates me, and to be tormented by a better version of myself. You want me to show it mercy?” he said the word mercy dripping with venom.

“I expect you to do the right thing. It can’t hurt us anymore.”

“It tried to kill us, repeatedly!” Jacob shouted

“It was trying to protect itself.”

“You call that protecting itself, it would have been safer never to bring me in.”

“You were a threat, no we were a threat to it. Show it that we aren’t. Show it that we are better than it. We don’t have to fight anymore.” John pleaded

“The story is a part of me, I can’t be better than it or worse than it. We are one and the same!” Jacob shouted.

“And you still want to kill it. You once told me you wrote me to be better than you. A moral beacon you called me. Well if you know I am moral then listen to me.” John tried.

“I could only write you to be as moral an extent I could understand. I know what’s right and I know this is wrong. You are better than me because you are too flat a character to care about anything else. You don’t know how to do wrong.”

“I do know that you can do right.” John refuted, “Show it mercy.”

Jacob stared at the broken image of his former creation. It appeared to wilt as if it were a plant slowly being drained of water. The strands of blackness falling off of it were becoming increasingly liquid like and the heat of the glowing blade cauterizing the flowing murk near its neck. It was pathetic. This was the creature who brought them here this was the creature that nearly wiped them from existence. This was a shambling pile of sludge and scrap desperately clinging on to life. Jacob’s sword stopped glowing as his fury abated. He lifted the blade from the creature and instead offered it his hand to help it up from the near kneeling position it had collapsed into during their fight.

“Mercy, I knew it.” The broken beast said tauntingly. “I knew you couldn’t kill me. No matter how much you wanted to. Go on then, its time you go home. Just leave the story to me, I will fix it where you couldn’t.”

“You will do no such thing. John is leaving the story, and you aren’t touching it again. I refuse to let you change what we have forged here.”

“Jacob, Jacob, Jacob, you never learn do you. You can’t control the story. You can only obey it or oppose it. In the end I do what I always have. Whatever I want.”

“You know I could still kill you right?” Jacob asked

“You won’t.” The story replied sure of itself. “Now let’s see how you end this story.”

Jacob stopped arguing. It was like talking to a brick wall. In the end he knew he could enforce whatever regulation he needed.

“John, it was good meeting you for real. I hope you enjoy life out there in my world. I will make sure that my remaining characters are well taken care of here.’ Jacob said to John.

“Alright Mark, take him to the real world.” Jacob requested.

Mark stared back blankly. “I never had the power of dimensional travel. Only space and time. I can’t take him out. I only made it here because I was pulled here in the dimensional break.”

Jacob had completely forgotten Mark’s limitations, but quickly offered a solution.

“I could just give you that power, it fits with your others.” Jacob offered, “And it would explain a plot hole in your story if one-time line of you could do so. I never explained how the void walker in your story came to be and as a time traveler with an infinite amount of realities being possible this story could be canon to yours.”

Mark thought about it for a moment. “Very well, I will accept this new power. “

Jacob holds his hand out to Mark. Mark starts floating and glowing a slight green. The light slowly envelops his whole body then burns brighter for a few moments before fading out completely. In the midst of the glow he was given a new dark gray cloak and hood giving him a much duller, yet much more commanding appearance.

“Now take John home.” Jacob commanded.

Mark held his hands forth and tested his new found power. Reality seemed to waver in place where Mark pointed, somehow visible even in the bland white. Then color appeared. A soft white tan color of painted drywall. From that point of color, a ring of white and gray energy formed a ring which slowly expanded until it was roughly human sized. Now through the ring you could clearly see Jacob’s bedroom. Jacob went to say his goodbyes again, but instead the portal snapped shut in front of them.

“You know, when you let a potentially powerful force live and it promises that it won’t listen to you, you really should keep an eye on it.”

Everyone turned back to see what was left of the story. Only instead of the black slimy figure they expected to see was instead replaced with a glowing blue figure who was rapidly shedding a what was left of its dark encasement.

“Hello Jacob, It’s been a while.”

Now without the distortion of the sludge the figures voice game out clear as day. Jacob knew the voice, it was a voice that never left him when he wrote, and even here in the sanctuary of his own story he couldn’t escape it. It was the voice of his inner editor. A digital voice, a soulless voice, that existed only to tell him he was wrong.

“Did you miss me?”

“I should have known you would be the one behind all of this.”

Jacob attempted to draw his sword back, but he found himself unable to do so. Then he tried to make something else, but couldn’t in fact he couldn’t even think of what to make.

“What, what is happening.” Jacob asked.

“Oh I forgot to introduce you to my friend,” The editor said, “Meet the writer’s block.”

With that the remaining sludge and scraps lying on the ground began to move. They flowed strangely. First only moving slightly before beginning to flow upwards in spiraling tendrils. Above the editor the tendrils began to meet each other wrapping around one another and fusing into a rough shape. Soon the tendrils pulled up the entirety of the pool beneath him and the shape above him formed into a perfect cube. “As long as I control it your powers can’t operate.”

“Mark, do something.” Jacob cried.

“I’m trying.” Mark responded. He attempted to teleport away or back in time to before the editor had re-empowered itself, but it was futile.

“How cute. All your character’s powers stem from you. Without your power, none of them have any. Now stand still and die.” The editor’s glowing body rose into the air in front of the cube. He splayed his arms and legs out and suddenly brought them all forth carrying a wave of blue energy towards the group. They all jumped out of the way avoiding a tremendously powerful blast. Where the energy hit the ground rather than char or a crater. There was pure blackness that stood in contrast to the white. The editor sent a volley of energy with smaller bursts heading toward John and Mark, then one larger blast toward Jacob. Jacob again managed to dodge the sparking blue plasma, but John was not so lucky. His right arm was struck by an arc of lightning emanating from the blast. Where he was struck his arm dissolved immediately. Just beyond the mark his elbow was now the same deep black as the floor. Soon the real implications of the injury became apparent. Not only had John lost his arm, but the rest of it was slowly dissolving into the blackness. It was turning into dark goo which dripped off of the injury just as it had from the editor before.

“The attacks spread!” John called out, hoping to warn his friends.

Neither seemed to hear him. The editor unleashed a new attack now. He formed a red pen out of the nothingness which presided around him. He waved it in a downward motion creating a line of red in thin air which then propelled itself toward Mark. He ran, but the red line was gaining. So he stopped and waited as it approached. As soon as he deemed it close enough he rolled towards it going under it. As he had hoped the line jutted down to try and catch him, but missed. However, this had not solved the problem. Now the line stuck halfway into the ground and continued to follow him leaving a trail of red behind it as he went.

John was having no better of a time as the editor had unleashed a platoon of small energy pellets which continually attempted to dive bomb him leaving a new black mark where each one hit the ground. Just like the spreading darkness on his arm the blackness on the ground continued to expand outwards. Jacob stepped in one of the black puddles as he was attempting to find his way out of his own dilemma, a wave like blob which flowed after him and tried to wash over him. His shoe had started to dissolve and so he kicked it off and kept running. Little by little the white void around them was being filled with blackness and redness as the editor’s attacks followed the group members. John was the first to fall. The wound on his arm had climbed up to his shoulder and now was spreading to his neck. He collapsed to the ground. The pellets lost interest and instead attempted to chase Mark. Mark was next, the red line had run a circle around him and was now spiraling inwards should he try to escaped he would surely run into part of its trail. For him it was only a matter of time for when the line would hit him or the new cloud of pellets following. Jacob was the last to fall victim to the editor’s powers. He managed to outrun the offending wave of blackness for as long as he could. He became exhausted and could no longer outrun the wave. It struck his legs and they quickly dematerialized from under him dropping his upper torso a few feet in front of the puddle. It too quickly lost interest.

The editor watched the show with sickening amusement. He merely laughed as the group fell victim to his assault. John lay on the ground a blackness crawling over his skin. By now it had reached to above his heart. Jacob attempted to crawl away his waist melting into the darkness, and he watched as the red line finished wrapping around him. Suddenly everything stopped. The three began to float into the air confused.

“Look at you, it’s pitiful. I went through all this trouble and this is all you can do to reward me. This was meant to be fun.” The editor ranted. “I barely did anything and you were already down for the count.”

“How do you expect us to fight back without our powers?” John asked.

“You misunderstand. You weren’t supposed to fight back. You were just supposed to last longer, but that’s ok we can do this again and again.”

The editor lifted an ethereal limb and his hand pulsated a glowing green. As each pulse reached the tips of his fingers the wave left his hand and bathed the scene with a green glow. When the glow passed over Mark the red line wrapped around him dissipated, and as it shone upon Jacob and John the black inky sections retreated downward along newly constructed limbs. The editor was healing them.

“Here’s your second chance. Make it more enjoyable for me this time.”

The editor sent out a final pulse of green from his ghostly body. It washed over the three and finished the healing process. Then he dropped his hand and the three fell to the ground. This time the editor determined he would target them only one at a time. He started with Mark.

He threw Mark far from the others. As soon as he landed a black box formed on the ground around him. He had only a few paces in either direction before he would run into the border. Before he could react it suddenly stretched upward towering over him. He was surrounded on all sides with a solid black. Then came a burst of white, somewhere on his left. In the otherwise complete darkness he looked towards it only to find it was rocketing toward him. It collided with him, but did nothing.

“That was a warning shot. The next won’t be so painless.”

 Mark believed him and when the next white burst came into sight he made sure to avoid it. More and more bursts of energy came in more and more shapes and sizes. At some point they started coming from behind him too, forcing him to have to look backwards. Then from his sides, and eventually even from the roof and floor of his enclosure. He was forced to rapidly spin looking in all directions as the energy bursts came faster and faster to ensure he wouldn’t be caught off guard by another hit, but it couldn’t be helped. They were coming too fast to dodge them all. One caught his leg giving him a small shock, followed by a larger shock on his arm, and a yet larger shock on his back. With each impact the pain grew worse.

Satisfied with Mark’s predicament the editor turned to John. An arena formed around him as well this time the floor dropping several feet down everywhere except where he stood. The surrounding lowered pit magically began to fill with lava providing no doubts to what would happen should John fall. Then more platforms appeared around him each higher than the last. Once they spanned as high John could see. His platform started to fall. Slowly they all began to lower toward the molten stone beneath them. John began jumping from one platform to the other in a desperate climb. Each one he landed on began to fall faster. Overwhelmingly he was being pulled down towards the blazing surface.

Now the editor moved on to Jacob. He mulled for a moment wondering how best to destroy him. Jacob didn’t receive an arena as the others had, he would need full freedom to move for this fight. In front of John a new blob of blackness appeared before him, and his sword rematerialized in his hand. The single slime creature leapt toward him and got slashed in half mid-air. When the two pieces landed they each formed a new slime. Both leapt toward him this time. Again Jacob attacked them, yet another formed from each of their pieces. Every time he fought back his enemies doubled, but if he didn’t fight they would surely begin to dissolve him again. He continued slashing at the enemies as they jumped, but he only made his situation worse.

The editor looked back to Mark. He looked as if he were dancing crazily as he attempted to avoid the ever present energy bolts, he still got hit every so often and winced in pain. Then he looked to John. John was already tiring, he continued leaping from platform to platform, and remarkably he was actually a good deal higher than where he had started, but John was most certainly slowing down. Jacob was as busy as ever as there were at least fifty slimes chasing him now. Each smaller and harder to hit than the last. Then something he wasn’t expecting happened. Jacob threw his sword. The editor instinctively phased out so it wouldn’t hit him, but the sword wasn’t headed his direction at all. Instead the sword was thrown to John. Jacob began running from the slimes toward the pit. John saw the sword had landed in a platform two or three beneath him, but didn’t know why Jacob had thrown it. The editor was equally discombobulated. He continued watching.

“Use the sword John!” Jacob called from the edge of the pit. It was as ambiguous as could be, but at least John knew he needed it. He started back down and grabbed the weapon. In the meantime, Jacob had found the solution to his own problem. Every time one of the slimes jumped toward him he moved and let it jump over the edge behind him falling into the lava. John saw Jacobs creative solution and realized Jacob expected him to get himself out of the situation with the sword somehow. He saw how the sword had been immune to the dissolving powers of the black goo and looked down. Sure enough the surface of the lava was slowly being covered in the black tar of the slimes. John jumped onto a platform above the darkening portion hoping that the solution he had in mind worked.

The editor was fascinated, he had intended the challenges to be unavoidable, but two used their challenge to resolve the others. He wondered how they planned to solve Marks dilemma. However, Mark was the least of their worries for the moment. Jacob was focused on not getting hit into the pool of hard black that he had been heling to make. And John was waiting on his platform to finish approaching it. He closed his eyes as the platform finally touched the surface. It floated on the blackness and began to dissolve at the edges. Quickly John grabbed the sword and used it as an oar shifting the platform to the edge of the pool. Where he began to climb out. He threw the sword up and grabbed the edge of the drop off pulling himself up. Jacob grabbed the sword as soon as it came up and began deflecting the remaining slimes with the flat end of the sword as John managed to get out. Soon Jacob had batted the rest of them into the lava and the two were safe for the moment.

Mark was still struggling with his challenge. By now the pain of getting hit had built up enough that a single blow would make him shriek in agony, and unfortunately for him years of rely on his powers to move effectively had left him rather uncoordinated without them. As the attacks continued he wondered if this was how he would die. Thankfully he didn’t have long to brood on this thought as a new shine appeared, the glint of light off a sword. It quickly cut a hole in the wall. At first Mark thought the stark white behind it was just a new projectile to dodge until Jacob appeared in front of it and grabbed him.

The editor looked at the three of them and frowned. It was far less fun when they actually had a chance, he couldn’t allow it to continue. He vanquished the sword with a wave of his hand, and he flew up to the three.

“You know, if I didn’t hate you, I might have let you live after that display. Unfortunately for you I loathe you all. Good bye.”

 Suddenly new walls of blackness formed behind them forming a corner holding them in. The editor held his hand up and a ball of blue energy expanded around it arcing lighting across its surface. When it was larger than his head he held it in front of him and released a torrent of energy. Mark, Jacob, and John all closed their eyes and waited for the inevitable, but it never came. When they opened their eyes they saw a brief glimpse of a flaming rift in front of them with a gray barren landscape on the other side before it closed leaving an appalled editor on the other side.

 “HOW DID YOU DO THAT!?” He demanded, “The writer’s block should have removed your powers.”

 Before waiting on an answer he attacked again. This time his arm stretched into the shape of a lance and solidified. He charged at Jacob and stabbed through his heart, but when he looked down. There was another smaller portal in front of him. He attempted to pull back only to have the portal close on his arm lance cutting it at the end and scalding its remains.

 The editor shot a glare towards Jacob who was only smiling.

“You know, before you try to kill the protagonists of a story, make sure they have Dues ex Machina on their side.” Jacob mocked. Now Jacob was confident, he recognized these portals and he was most certainly happy about who it meant was on their side.

 “Mark, John, we have reinforcements.” Jacob said happily.

The editor on the other hand was not happy the walls behind them suddenly spewed forth spikes nearly impaling the three, but beneath their feet new portal had formed and they had dropped into the gray wasteland.

 “Who are you?!” The editor demanded enraged. “I know all of Jacob’s characters, why don’t I know you?”

 “He isn’t my character.” Jacob said. Behind the editor the three stood together. Now joined by a fourth. A Pale skinned figure in a black cloak laced with flaming designs. His hair was a fine white that faded to red at the ends and reached down past his elbows. His face was unsettling as his mouth formed an inhumanly large sharp toothed smile and his eyes were a near solid black only interrupted by a blood red x shaped iris.

 “Meet Silaro. A character created for me by a friend oh so long ago. I never made a story for him because I thought he was too powerful to have a decent adversary. He doesn’t talk much, but he doesn’t have to. After all actions speak louder than words.” Jacob said smirking.

 Silaro’s impossibly large grin grew even further. He held out a hand to the editor. The long sleeve of his cloak retreating down the arm revealing ghastly clawed hands. The editor looked at him confused. He was offering a handshake.

“Do you think I am stupid.” He asked. Rather than accepting the handshake he instead greeted the newcomer with an energy blast. Without so much as flinching two portals opened one caught the blast and the other released it back toward the editor. He seemed unfazed.

“So. Silaro as strong as he is I doubt he could beat you, but that doesn’t matter, because just the fact that he is here tells me something.” Jacob taunted. “The writer’s block can’t stop anything that I didn’t write, and trust me I have the whole public domain to work with.”

The editor continued attacking trying to hit any of them. Each attack was only met with a portal which launched the attack back at him. This was ridiculous. He wouldn’t stand for it. The editors body split into two new forms then four. One of him for each of them.

The first rushed Silaro tackling him by surprised. Rather than blocking, He formed a portal underneath the two and they fell into his barren dimension. The next rushed Jacob who had re-equipped himself with a drawing from past stories the sword turned out to be none other than Excalibur. Jacob had not forgotten his friends either, He granted John the power of Zeus to fight his battles, and he restored Marks teleportation by granting him a magic ring an artifact from a famous witch story.

The four fights coincided. The Editor clone before Jacob forged a sword of his own. While Jacob wielded Excalibur a light weight one handed sword, the editor had a purple two handed broadsword. When the two met splashes of sparks flew. At the same time the editor clone attacking John was met by surges of howling wind preventing him from approaching while vicious waves crashed in around John the editor emulating the power of Poseidon. Mark and another clone were warping around each other at extreme speeds. They matched each other blow for blow. Surrounding all of this were a pair Silaro and the first editor still grappled onto each other falling through portal after portal. Some of them were the flaming slashes which signified Silaro’s power, while others were ovular with distorted rings of reality as the editor copied the ability Jacob had once given to mark. All four of the brawls seemed to be unmoving each one equally as strong as the other. Soon however it became obvious that the editor was still on top. The Dark sword was pushing Excalibur further back with every hit. The fierce winds were unable to hold the tides back and the came crushingly closer to John. Mark was unable to keep up with his opponent for long as each hit he landed did little to faze the editor while the hits he was receiving were as excruciating as ever. Even Silaro seemed to be unable to keep up as the clone he faced learned to nullify his portals by placing one of his own in front of them and one on the side he wished to attack. Unlike Silaro the portals could go anywhere. All of Silaro’s had to pass through his dimension.

“Help!” John called as his energy seemed to subside. The waves came crashing down, but Mark warped away from his fight to grab him. The editor tried to follow, but was caught in his clones waves. The force hit him like a train and his body faded away. Not to be outmatched the editor controlling the waves split again. Jacob realized that each one was better suited to fight a different copy of the editor as each on matched their powers but stronger.

“Switch” Jacob called. As he rolled out of the way of an oncoming strike. Had the blade made contact he would have been split in too, but instead his blade stuck a few inches into the ground a few inches. John was the first to respond. He saw the brute in front of Jacob pull his sword free lifting it over head. He called down a bolt of lightning which coursed down the blade and into the copy. He too dissipated. This time the one fighting Silaro made a new copy. He split in two mid-air dropping one side beyond the portal Silaro had set beneath him. Fortunately, two new portals caught each side and slammed them together again. Mark stepped in to help Silaro, he grabbed hold of one of the two editors and stepped halfway through a portal nodding to Silaro. The portal closed as Mark teleported out snapping the copy in half and burning each side. Yet every time they took out one another split restoring the balance. The fight went on for what seemed like an eternity. By assisting one another the group could eliminate a copy, but the editor would only spawn another to fight them. While the four of them were tiring, the editor’s stamina seemed infinite.

“We need to bring them all together.” Mark said.

The group of editor clones didn’t seem to like the idea. Instead they continued their divide and conquer system. The four editors each focused their attacks on their adversary, but each of them avoided their lashes. Jacob’s opponent re-engaged in their sword to sword combat while John’s lightning bolts were diverted by surges of water. Mark and Silaro continued switching their opponents. One matched the ability to teleport while the other matched the ability to make portals their similarities enabled them to effectively fight each other despite being another match. Many time the editor died and equally many times a new one emerged from another fight. Where the editor had an infinite number of attempts the four of them only had one. Jacob realized the only way that they could beat him is if they took them all out at once, and the only way to do that would be to have them all focusing on one of them.

“Silaro! Get them out of here. I need to finish this myself.” Jacob called out.

Silaro narrowly avoided the editors flying kick next to him as his attention shifted to Jacob. He nodded silent as ever and opened a portal under himself and disappeared to his realm grabbing the others through quick series of portals formed next to them. The editors attempted to follow. One opening a portal of their own to the grey wasteland Silaro lived in, but Jacob’s voice stalled them.

 “Hey, they are just characters. You care about killing me not them.”

 ::: “I care about killing all of you pesky nuisances,” One of the clones said. He paused for a moment contemplating. “but if I kill you it will be all the easier to stop them.”

 The editor clone in front of the portal let it fade and the others who had been behind him also turned. They all ran back into the swordsman fighting Jacob.

 “You could barely stand up to a fourth of me alone. Let’s see how well a miserable whelp like you can stand up to me now. “

 The ethereal blue energy forming his body glowed and his dark purple blade grew to nearly twice the size now bigger than the form carrying it. Yet the editor swung the blade with ease. Yet Jacob had dodged quickly and quickly wrote in a potion of vitality to protect himself should he need it. The Editor continued rushing him but he blocked each attack blow for blow. No matter how hard he tried however he was forced on the defensive. The editor was relentless and left no opening to attack. At this rate he had no chance to defeat the editor in sword combat. He sprinted back from the editor desperately trying to think of a way to get past his defenses. For the editor however offense was the best defence. He continued attacking pulling out a new bow and a quiver full of arrows. Jacob narrowly avoided getting hit by the arrows by hiding behind the writer’s block which resounded a metal clang when the arrows impacted it.

 ::: “Coward. You taunt me into solo combat and then you run from me when I agree.”

Despite the taunts Jacob hid behind the cube. More clangs of metal echoing from the back end of the floating cube of metal and sludge.

 ::: “Come on!. I don’t have all day. Come out and die like a man.” The editor called to him.

 Jacob grabbed the potion and downed it in an instant. He felt empowered.

 “Put away the Bow!” Jacob called. “I will fight you sword to sword.”

 :::“Whatever it takes to get rid of you.” The editor spat indignantly. The bow and arrow vanished, and Jacob stepped back out.

As if in an unspoken deal the two approached each other and crossed their swords. Both wordlessly agreeing that this would be the final battle. They each took a step back and the battle began anew. The editor swung for the Jacobs legs, but he swiftly met the blade with his own. The editor ran his blade up Jacob’s toward his waste, but Jacob leapt back swinging his sword upward with the editor’s and carrying his higher upward. The editor pushed forward and downward forcing Jacob to fall backwards toward the writer’s block. Jacob could barely withstand the weight of the sword pushing down above him. He rolled right letting the editor’s sword slam into the ground beside him. Finally Jacob was able to attack, he jumped up from the ground and swung upward cutting through the editor’s sword arm as he tried to pull his sword up from the ground. His arm fell and his sword still lay stuck in the ground, but with his other arm he was able to catch Jacob’s left arm. He held him in place and unleashed a blast of energy from the regenerating limb on his right sending Jacob flying further back.

 ::: “That actually hurt. I’d say I’d make your death horrible for you, but a quicker death is much more convenient.”

The editor drudged over to him and blasted Jacob’s fallen body again causing him to slide across the floor. Jacob stabbed his sword into the ground attempting to use it to pull himself up, but before he lifted himself another surge of energy hit him knocking him to the ground a foot or two away from his sword and no energy left to retrieve it.

 ::: “I have waited too long for this.” The editor let out

 He approached Jacob and waved his hands blue ethereal chains wrapping around each of Jacob’s limbs. He stood towering over Jacob, and reached over grabbing the hilt of Excalibur, but when he attempted to pull it didn’t move. Not only did the sword stay motionless, now so did the editor. The swirling blue clouds of energy making up his body came to a sudden halt.

::: “What is this!?” The editor called out.

Jacob chuckled then broke out into a full out laugh.

The blue clouds inside the editor slowly faded to a light gray.

::: “What have you done to me?”

Jacob spat out blood that had been pooling in his mouth.

 “The thing about using old stories,” Jacob started,” is that there are many versions, and it just so happens that this version of Excalibur turns any unworthy who tries to pull it from its stone to ash.”

He laughed again and pointed at the base of the sword where a large rounded stone had formed a minute earlier.

 “You lose.” Jacob said spitting out another spout of his own blood.”

The remaining blue in the editor’s body turned a deep crimson red and he tried to lurch forward. With enough willpower he was able to move but as he took a step towards Jacob his leg collapsed, as he fell onto the other pushing himself forward it too disintegrated. His torso fell on top of Jacob and collapsed into ash as it made contact. Finally, the last of the editor fell apart leaving Jacob on the ground doused in the editors remains. Moments later the chains holding Jacob down dissipated and he stood alone with the writer’s block which had fallen to the ground and was leaking its black ooze into a puddle beneath it. Jacob attempted to use his powers writing himself the ability to summon Silaro from his dimension. Silaro appeared before him with no trace of his normal portals. It had worked.

 “It’s over” Jacob said, “We won.”

Silaro just nodded as usual and opened a portal to his realm where Mark, and John had been waiting. The two rushed through the portal glad to see their friend still alive.

 “What happened?” John demanded, “how did you beat him?”

 Jacob was still recovering. The residual effects of the potion were slowly healing his wounds, but he was still exhausted from the arduous battle that had taken place mere moments ago.

 “I tricked him into pulling Excalibur,” Jacob explained. “It turns the unworthy to Ash, but I had to take a hell of a beating to get him to do it.”

 Jacob held up his hand and made a machine appear before him. He collapsed afterwards, but the machine was marked with a red cross, so the others knew what to do. They placed him into the glass chamber on the front of the machine and closed it. The chamber filled with a red liquid which at first John had mistaken for bloodied water, but when the water drained Jacob stood there fully restored. The chamber reopened and allowed him to step out. The rest of the group took their turns in the machine too, ensuring that any injury they had sustained in the battle be undone.

 “It’s time to say goodbye,” Mark said, “I can’t stay forever. Now that I know I still have a role to play in my own story.”

 Silaro also said goodbye in his own way. He formed a great fiery rift and stepped through, waving to them as he closed it.

 John was next to speak. “A normal life, you gave me that out there. I will make sure to do well with it.” He said as he hugged Jacob.

 “Take care out there. I’m sure you will do fine.” Jacob said

 Mark no longer had need of his ring with his powers restored. He formed a portal of his own the same rippling white border as before.

 “Good luck in the real world.” Mark said, “I hope it serves you better than ours have.”

 John stepped out into the real world and the portal closed behind him.

Now only Jacob and Mark remained.

 “Do you need a ride out of the void before I go?” Mark asked.

 “Nah I can get out.” Jacob replied.

“Well I best be on my way then. I have an infinite amount of myself to save in my timeline. Kind of a shame we will always end up there again.” Mark said

“You know I never accounted for your position in your story. Every instance of you was accounted for except the one you are now. That means after you do what you have too. You’re free.” Jacob explained.

Mark began to smile, he looked giddy for a moment and then another. In the whole of seemingly endless eternities he has had to live through I doubt he had ever had so much joy.

“Thank you Jacob.” Mark said, as he turned toward a new portal still smiling madly.

“Oh one more thing.” Jacob said.

“What is it?”

“I changed my mind I do need a ride out, but I want to go back to a few hours ago. Before Cyber found us.” He requested.

“You can’t change the past, what happened, happened. The only point in flux was the whole battle with the editor and I refuse to take you back there.”

“I know I can’t change the past, but I don’t have too.” Jacob said. “Like you said earlier if we go back. It always happened that way.”

“Very well.” Mark said grabbing Jacob’s shoulder and whisking him away into the past.

When they appeared again they were outside of John’s house where they ran from the story’s embodiment not so long ago.

“Cyber said he fell on the streets when I first got pulled into the story then he made it to the lab with us. That means he is going to be somewhere around here soon.” Jacob said.

True to his word a familiar white flash of light covered everyone’s sight. Jacob knew that inside John’s computer had just flooded and the younger version of Jacob had just fallen onto the front porch and immediately rushed in. Finally, beside them the automaton body of Cyber fell beside them.

“What now?” Mark asked.

“Now we save him.” Jacob said.

He approached the machine as it started to stir. Then he pulled out a large futuristic flash drive.

“You meant that literally?” Mark asked.

“Completely.” Jacob agreed.

Jacob plugged the drive a port in the back of Cyber’s neck. The machine fell still for a moment and a plate unfolded revealing a tiny monitor, a portable computer built into Cyber for on the go adjustments if you had the right access codes. Jacob copied Cyber’s consciousness onto the drive and transferred a file explaining to him how he got here realizing that without it Cyber would have no way of knowing and therefore no way of telling them earlier. When all was done Jacob took the drive and with Mark vanished back into the future leaving Cyber to wake up none the wiser to this intrusion.

When they reappeared they were in the same place outside of John’s house.

“That’s it then. If I am no longer needed I will return to my world.” Mark said.

“Best of luck, I hope you come back to visit.” Jacob replied.

“Oh please, you won’t be able to get rid of me!” Mark joked. “See you soon”

Mark jumped through a portal formed behind him which slowly receded once he was on the other side sealing together with a pop. Jacob clasped the drive in his hand tightly and walked inside eager to begin writing his favorite character a new body. And so the story draws to a close as each of the heroes set their different ways and set on to forge their own lives without the restriction of the written word.

When John came too he was surprised. Beneath his arms which tingled from the weight of his head resting upon them was large printed document. Regaining his senses, he looked back to papers. A big page in the front held the title Meta and the last page regarded him. At first he thought that perhaps the entire story had been a crazy dream fueled by the story he had written before him, but he didn’t get to ponder the thought long.

“Jacob! You forgot to take out the trash again!” His pseudo-mother called.

He stalled for a moment before recognizing she was referring to him.

He hurried away from his desk and out the door drawing it to a close behind him.

At last the story was alone again. Jacob’s favorite blue pen still lay resting on top of it from where he had written earlier. From its tip a final drop of ink plummeted to the paper forming a tiny splotch directly beyond the words

**THE END .**

(Note to self for resolution of battle. Silaro takes John, Mark, and himself to safety in his dimension. Jacob draws the full attention of the Editor. The editor fuses all four back into one. Jacob stabs Excalibur into the ground and taunts the editor. In response the editor shoots a blast at Jacob that knocks him down. Editor towers over him and goes to finish him off by pulling Excalibur up, but it doesn’t move. Jacob explains the funny thing about using the public domain is that there are several stories about any given thing, and in his favorite story about Excalibur if anyone unworthy of it tries to pull it out of the stone they turn to ash. The editor promptly crumples into ash and the fight ends.)