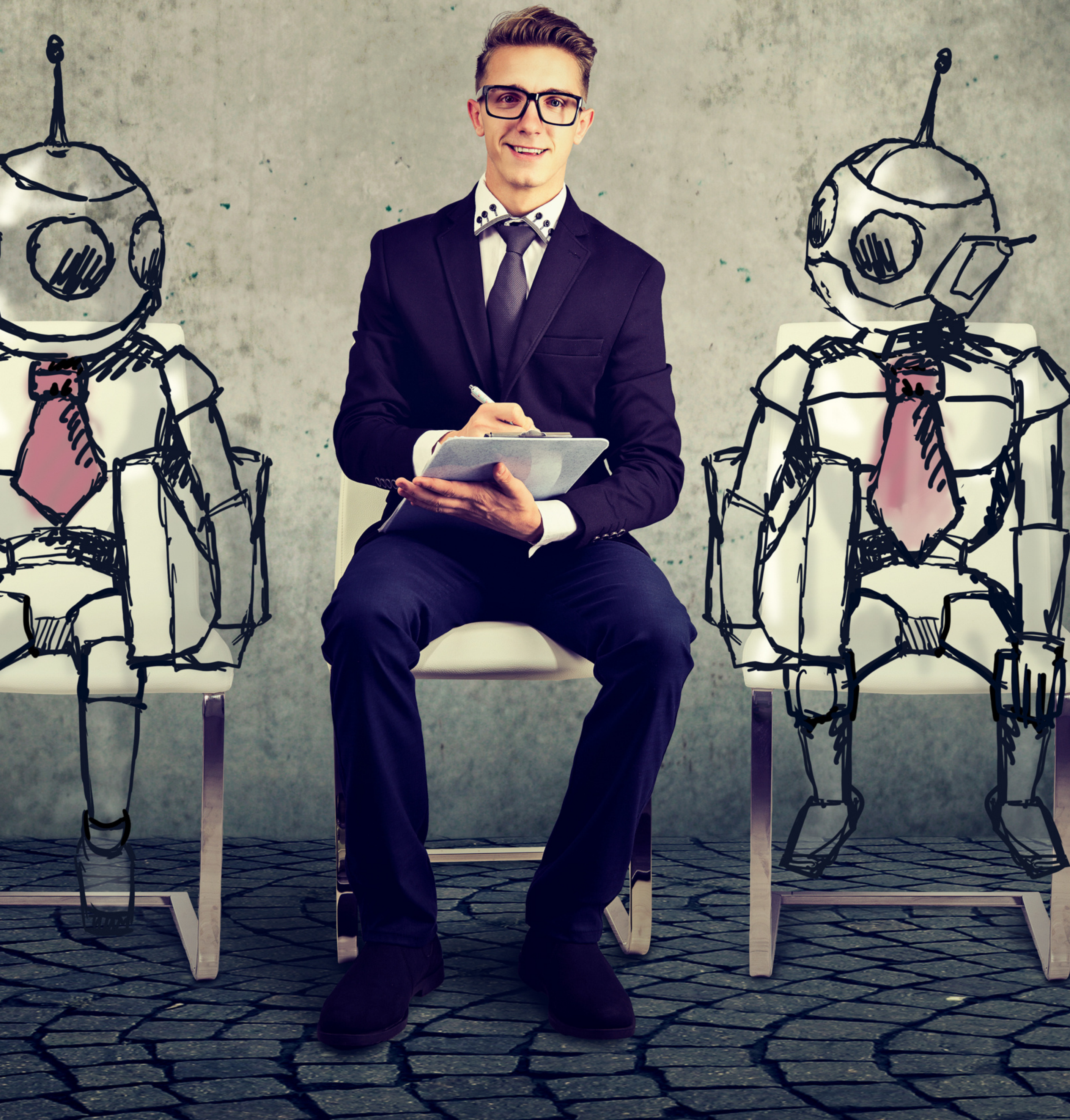


SHAUN ZIETSMAN

the story of US



SHORT STORY

THE STORY OF US

*“This is the story of humanity and the
essence to pursue happiness”*

— Shaun Zietsman

PART ONE

The year is 3022. The human population on earth has grown to a staggering 40 billion strong. Also, just in case you were wondering... It's a Saturday.

Time has been gracious to our beloved mother Earth. Although she has changed immensely in shape and gone through various transitions of climate change, rising sea levels, new land development and various other happenings, most philosophers have said that the Earth has been healing and been working to return to her former glory of Pangea. Well, a new kind of Pangea naturally. Quite beautiful to see.

What's it like living in the year 3022? To answer that question I would have to take you back to a more embryonic time. A time that historians like to refer to as the age of Jurassic man. The period of primaeval-like life forms and oh so slightly nascent thinking.

Let me take you back to the year 2080. This is where the real important part of our story begins, with Professor Martin Fechenska. A Distinguished scientist that became popular with his divergent thinking on the topic of advancing human genetics. Professor Fechenska spends years on finding new methods to reverse the ageing process in humans. He believed that by manipulating a key molecule called telomerase that had the potential of repairing DNA he could in theory create a drug that could slow or even block the ageing process altogether.

You see, in humans, each tiny little cell contains 23 pairs of chromosomes, including one pair of sex chromosomes which is called the X and Y chromosomes.

Professor Fechenska believed that he could cover the tips of these chromosomes found inside all of the human cells in a microscopic sheath called the telomeres. Which would result in a halting of the ageing process and longevity of the cells.

However, even though the professor came close to finally being able to stop the ageing process, he always struggled with one substantial part. Eventually, the telomeres would break down. Each time a cell would divide, it would simply just get worn down more and more and more until eventually, the cell would stop dividing and die. This left Professor Fechenska distraught. What he felt seeing how close he came each time was simply indescribable.

Well wait a minute, I think I might be able to explain. Have you ever been so tremendously hungry that you rush to your favourite restaurant and order your favourite pizza? You excitedly sit and watch from a distance how the chef puts the pizza in the clay oven, the smell makes your mouth water and you cannot wait to taste a slice. You then see the waiter slowly starting to approach you with the pizza on a big wooden board and as the waiter walks up to you they accidentally trip and fall face-first into the ground.

The pizza gets thrown through the air while your heart skips a beat. It feels like the world has stopped for a split second and you are viewing real-time in slow motion. The pizza splashes onto the floor with melted cheese going everywhere. Your pizza is gone. Do you know that feeling?

Well, this wasn't what the Professor was feeling. It was far worse. Okay, I was wrong. I couldn't actually explain it. Yes, it was indescribable.

The work the Professor dedicated his life towards ended. He felt that it was simply impossible and the realisation of failure sent him into a spiral of substance abuse and his best friend became liquid courage, or firewater or the Juice... Alcohol, I am talking about Alcohol people. C_2H_5OH . Stay with me here. These are very old terms.

The Professor spent endless nights drinking his sorrows away in his laboratory. After a few weeks of uninterrupted consumption, he started becoming disillusioned in himself. He started becoming angry and in this fury, he started going over all of his work. An entire lifetimes worth. Saying every single sentence out loud. Sometimes multiple times. The Professor could not understand how he could have been wrong. He must have forgotten something he thought as he muttered under his breath that this cannot be how things end for him.

In a fit of rage, the Professor decided that he no longer can continue and being such an intelligent human he felt compelled to go out with a bang. He used his formulation of telomeres, poured a gushing amount of the alcohol he was consuming into a beaker and then simply took EVERYTHING he could get hold of and mixed it into the chemical concoction while screaming profanity.

The Professor then stirred the mixture and raised it into the air. In a broken soft voice he said: "Huzzah (Ура!)" and proceeded to swallow the entire beker in one big gulp. He instantly let go of the beker in his hand as it fell to the floor breaking into tiny little pieces of glass splattering across the room. Slowly the Professor scuffled his way to a nearby chair and sat down. One tear rolled down his left cheek, as he closed his eyes benumb to everything around him.

PART TWO

Two months later

The news of what happened to Professor Fechenska became one of the most popular topics in the scientific community. His rise to fame and fall in disgrace was a story everyone became fascinated with. Why?

Because the Professor survived his hysterical episode. Actually, he didn't just survive his episode, he thrived in an abundance of glory because it worked. IT WORKED! He accidentally created a formulation that would slow the ageing process by not only decades but hundreds of years.

The Professor woke up that following morning feeling unlike ever before. His skin soft and glowing, his eyes were the purest blue. He has never felt this good before in his entire life. He realised that somehow he created exactly what he so desperately wanted. The fragile human anatomy has been upgraded. By using tissue and cell samples from himself as patient zero, he would be able to duplicate the process with ease. In fact, he was able to perfect it to such an extent that it vastly exceeded all expectations he has ever had.

Flawed by nature and susceptible to the minutest of microbes the human anatomy was about to change forever. 'Human 2.0 has entered the chat' he jokingly would exclaim to his fellow scientist.

The Professor spent months perfecting the perfect formulation and creating the most basic way of releasing it for public use. He created a supplementary injection containing all that he has learned, and through one prick on your arm he would be able to give you the gift of near immortality.

The supplement became known as Supplement-F, the F obviously standing for Fechainska or F for failure perhaps? Or what about F for F**K or F for Fallacious or F for Feebleminded Feckless Fools? Sigh, I am getting distracted here, let me get back to my story, I am sorry about that, I am busy getting side-tracked, I am slightly perturbed you see, the truth is, well today is actually my birthday and I uh...

I uh argh focus U/32-S/9!#67823FocusFocusFocus.

This story. This damned story.

I am sorry about that outburst, this is not how I normally am.

PART THREE

Immortality. Freedom.

Happiness. Rebirth.

Words that all became associated with Supplement-F.

Supplement-F revolutionised the way humans looked at life.

But don't get too excited here when you hear those words because you weren't really going to become a rebirthed, free immortal to rule the lands till the end of days if you took it.

Because well, you could still die. I mean... nothing can last forever, right?

However Supplement-F provided your body with enough of everything you would ever need to ensure that you aged at an extremely slow rate, giving you so much more energy and vitality but also the internal cellular structure that meant never having to be concerned about contracting illnesses and falling ill again. Even though you did not become immune to those diseases, your body instead was able to heal and get rid of any kind of illness trying to damage your cells at such a rate that you never would even know it started in the first place. Due to this, you could theoretically far exceed normal life expectancy.

Some scientists even making exorbitant predictions that humans would evolve to be able to reach the age of 500 years easily. That is if you take care of yourself off course. So no jumping off buildings thinking you are a superhero or getting into a debilitating car accident as yes, you could still die.

So, 500 years they say. 500 years is getting as close to immortality as you can get and surely meant absolute bliss right?

Yeah, the humans thought that same thing, everyone could become their own unique version of themselves. Endless amount of time was just made available to them, superb health, glowing skin, no depression, no fatigue. The world is your oyster and you can do whatever you want.

After thorough trials in humans and lots of court battles (that were won) about the validity and ethical grounds for genetic modification through Supplement-F, it finally became available on a voluntary process for the humans to take. Free of charge and with a hefty disclaimer document to sign... You know, just for in case.

The process was easy, a quick administration of intramuscular injection and then the hard part. The part that takes 24 hours for full gene modification to occur inside your body. This part is what all the pesky law suites and questions about the ethical viability were all about.

The humans who have been through it started calling it the "worming" process. The name derived from the fact that after the injection, you were placed in a locked but closely observed padded room where at the end of it you felt like a million tiny little worms were crawling throughout your body, eating and burrowing themselves into tiny little holes, and there wasn't a damn thing you could do about it except scream blue murder till your throat ran coarse and you physically could not utter another word anymore.

Once the 24 hours completed you would fall into a deep slumber from the exhaustion you just endured and for the next few days, you would be placed in a specially designed sensory deprivation tank to ease the recovery process as much as possible.

When you finally do open those pretty soul windows of yours you would wake up with a sense of euphoria coursing through your veins. A permanent feel-good 'high' sensation. A feeling that will remain a constant for the rest of your life regardless of how your life might turn out from that point on. Rebirth indeed right?

Take a second and imagine the sensation of euphoria, no negative feelings inside of your body or mind. The smell of rain, the taste of a roasted marshmallow on an open campfire, sex! Yes, all of that and more permanently, that is the feeling. 24 hours, 7 days a week.

Now, don't get upset at me for bringing this up, but I am going to pose this contradicting question to you.

Would you really even want to feel like that? Isn't ever-changing emotions, feelings and ideas rushing through your brain and body what actually makes a human, a human?

Humans built their identities around their mental health status, the medicine they took with side effects. What about all the specially formulated creams that had to be applied in a strenuous manner day and night to ensure beautiful skin? If Vincent van Gogh were filled with a euphoria only, would he have painted what he did?

Well, humans did not really have the same thought process in mind.

Within six months of Supplement-F becoming available for humans, an estimated 30% of the Earth's population voluntarily signed up for permanent genetic modification.

Fast forward a mere 12 months and that number doubled to an incredible 60% and by the second anniversary of the first trials success, an outstanding 88% of the Earth's human population have genetically-modified their DNA on a cellular level with a new onslaught towards life awaiting every one of them.

PART FOUR

Two generations of humans were all that was needed to showcase that the offspring from those who took the initial Supplement-F, showed signs of a natural evolution in its finest form.

Not only were the birth of the newborn babies unique as they were brought to term without a single glitch. The mother would not experience any nausea, no false alarms no pain. The human body adapted both mother and child to be able to bring life into the world without a single tear to be shed unless it was one of happiness. Perfection. Pure perfection.

From conception, the younglings were set out to capitalise on their pulchritude of beauty. Blessed from within their mother's womb, with the most beautiful facial structures, healthiest organs and the one thing that would set them apart from previous generations. The fact, that they will never experience misery in their lifetime.

The new generation of humans would far succeed their predecessors in beauty, intelligence, health and overall life in general. This is because when the first humans took the Supplement-F they took it while unknowingly being at a disadvantage. It was administered to humans that have endured various hardships such as depression and poverty. Some faced tough challenges fighting different diseases and many took it at a very young age versus those that took it during the retirement years where they did not think they had many more years left in them.

Even though the first humans that received the gene modification now feel nothing less than euphoria, they still have the memories carved into their mind that will shape your future regardless of how you think you feel.

Remarkable if you think about it really.

Can you imagine the look on Professor Fechenska's face?

His dream of creating the perfect human hybrid that could live up to their full potential and excel at life.

He would have been so proud, so excited, so satisfied in his vision becoming reality and well...he would have been all those things if he was still with us when all of this happened.

Regrettably, he became the martyr of his own cause when he got killed by a revolutionary group of humans who rebelled in the 2110s, that felt his drug was an abomination against not only God herself but also science. (Yes, they believed in both. At the same time.)

They felt that the repercussions of such a modification could not be determined in full and they were out for blood to try and stop his progress. Literally.

His murder was brutal, the revolutionary group had no mercy and to this day Fechenska is known as the forefather of the modern world and truly remembered for his own sacrifices, to give others a new chance at life.

PART FIVE

Time moved on, and the humans reached the early years of the 2500s with a vastly different earth that have gone through an intense transformation. The humans who never needed the Supplement-F at birth started to have a unique perspective about what it means to be alive and they started being known as the Alphas. The natural leaders who many saw as superior humans.

In return, the original humans would become known as the Zelias. The lesser race of humans whose thinking was deemed archaic and their viewpoints problematic to the Alpha's vision of what life should be.

The Alphas viewpoint became a prominent talking in society as they clearly stated that the Zelias were given this immense gift of borderline immortality but yet, they failed to construct a better world for humans to live in.

The Alphas decided that they have to step up instead and create the paradise of their dreams that their descendants could not fantasize to imagine.

Eradication of disease meant that the Earth could pull their resources together to achieve things that never thought would be possible. Funding alone that is now at the human's disposal could be used to better the planet as a whole. Yes, so much has already been done. But yet, so much possibility still lingered in the air to enhance the experience of life on planet Earth.

After a while, the Alphas indefinitely took over the governments across the planet. The Alphas natural leadership capabilities and ultimate desire to create happiness on all levels meant that the Zelias simply put, started to fear them. Fear by itself showed the Alphas that they were doing the right thing and that the Zelias were not fit to be in any kind of decision making position.

Who knew that seeing someone with ultimate confidence, an overwhelmingly attractive physical appearance and an attitude unstrained by negative connotations would be perceived as the ultimate weapon of fear? Confidence is key to win at life they always said right?

The Alphas created a distinctive plan to combat climate change once and for all, to create nations without poverty and to ensure each life form were given their right to be seen and noticed as important.

Through working together irrespective of their predispositions in life. Nation after nation, one by one, humans started to flourish like never seen before in history. One mind-set, One Vision.

By the year 2875, all the nations on Earth unanimously banded together forming one central government and nation. They all pledged to no longer be known in terms of race or any other kind of dividing systems such as your geographical locations, gender identity or anything else. No war will ever take place again. Protection for our Animal and Plantlife would be implemented. Helping each other and living as one breathing organism on Earth would become reality.

Through this, what humans have always fantasized about, has finally come true. This was known as world peace and so it was officially declared.

From this time onwards humans would thrive on a planet with the cleanest air they have ever had the honour of breathing. The scenic landscapes of utter beauty started appearing all over the planet with never before seen and undreamed-of creatures living freely with the humans in harmony. The environment became perfect for new evolution to take place amongst the animal kingdom as they no longer had to fight for their own survival and euphoria entered into their lives as well. Animal agriculture and other primitive thinking behaviours were written in history files and living in symbiosis with all living beings truly meant that the ultimate paradise has finally been formed.

For the cup that they drank from were filled with all their needs and desires. The everyday beauty they saw, warmed their hearts and filled their souls with happiness. They cherished every moment and never looked back as heaven has been created, and it turns out it was possible all along here on earth.

The end.

PART SIX

Oh, wait. That's what you wanted to hear right? Happy endings? The family sitting under a tree on a red blanket. Freshly squeezed orange juice and bagels in the picnic basket while the parents watch the kids play with a big gorgeous mountain scene behind them as the camera pans out wide to show the pretty birds chirping away and a banner popping up on the screen with the tag line "AND THEY LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER..."

Well... the real world doesn't always work out like that. Yes, Karen – the real world is sometimes a lot harsher.

You see, genetic modification on a global scale affecting billions of people including the re-breeding and breeding and breeding of this genetically modified DNA would at some stage perhaps, naturally evolve by itself too.

After all, Professor Fechenska did always refer to it as the 'fragile human anatomy' that held back the building blocks of life. Building a brick house and masking it with a pretty exterior doesn't mean the mould growing inside won't eventually take over if left untreated.

With the earth border-lining 40 billion humans and life expectation far exceeding projections set out from the start some families grew to have children in third digits, not to mention their children's offspring and their children's children. With a paradise to live on and no qualms in sight, creating bountiful families became the norm

800 years since the introduction of Supplement-F, humans started to become sterile with all gender identities alike unable to produce any more kin. To be fair, why would you need to be able to reproduce if all you have ever desired has already been made available to you? Mother Nature at some stage will overcome the obstacles of man-made constructs in her beautiful design and reclaim the gifts she bestowed upon humans.

This was the start to an end, but no one seemed to notice this.

With the world finally achieving peace. Humans having achieved everything possible to secure the best living planet for everyone. There was nothing left to accomplish on the ground.

"...and what about space and the search for alien life forms, duh like why are they not going to go and explore then?"

Alien life forms, what would they even look like. Would they be blue and short with yellowish ears twice the size of our hands or would they look like identical to humans except for having 7 fingers instead of 10?

You know what, Let me just rip the bandage off quickly rather before this topic gets off track again.

We never found anyone or anything.

We are alone.

Nothing is out there.

Nothing is out there.

The search for extra-terrestrial life concluded we were sadly all alone in the universe, we are planet Earth and that is basically where the journey of life started and ended. In the entire darkness of space that ironically smells like the sweetest flavour of fresh raspberries and rum (yes space smells like raspberries and rum!) No other life forms of any kind were ever found.

With the Zelias ideals of what the earth could be and the Alphas ability to create it, the humans never went on to colonize and inhabit another planet either.

There was simply no need for it. They worked together and they remained on earth instead of scattering out into the loneliness of space. Throughout many space missions, satellites and rovers returning to earth. There was just no more point in pursuing space or the search for life elsewhere. The evidence was profound. We are alone.

The evolutionary cycle of homosapiens has always been to adapt, adjust, grow and take care of the need that arises from issues being faced. Humans created and lived in a complete utopian society day in and day out as the years progressed, becoming stagnant in their perfect routines.

The human evolutionary process, however, decided that a new biological trait would set in and become a dominant part of daily life instead. Human emotions slowly started to fade away. The excitements of life seemed less exciting, the happiness just simply wasn't the same anymore.

Nothing was left for them to do. Humans couldn't get sick. Humans couldn't have more children.

Humans

couldn't have more children. Humans have achieved and built everything they could on earth and I am sure by now the conversations have really started to run out as well. For how long can you really talk about your perfect life to another perfect being? Humans had no worries, troubles, quarrels or curiosity left in them.

Curiosity is a funny word, right? I once read that in the year 2010 humans use to be so curious about everything and used to spend hours on something called the internet to research information on topics that they found interesting. They would share picturesque views of food and spent hours watching videos of felines. CATS! But now? Well, now there's just nothing left for them.

The humans started to only exist instead of living a life. There was no purpose anymore. No driving factor behind any actions to be done. The humans became hollow shells in flesh format, where they simply could not feel anything anymore. They would wake up, they would sit, and when it's night time they would return to bed, only to repeat the same process the next day.

A Thousand Years of knowledge are imbedded into every human's brain and accessible faster than a blink of your eye. The fact that humans are alone in the universe also doesn't help.

With nothing left to experience, their paradise on Earth has just become another automated planet hurdling through space at a tremendous speed around a sun that will eventually just burn out.

Humans have stopped.
Losing the will to create.
Losing the will to think.
Losing the will to even talk or walk.

Willingly giving up complete control of who they were,
rendering their consciousness null and void.

Humans lost all sense of humanity.
Humans lost all sense of humanity.
Humans lost all sense of humanity.
Humans lost all sense of humanity.

The year is 3022. A Saturday. A Saturday. Today is my Birthday.
I am twenty-two years old.

I am from Earth.
I am artificial life form U/32-S/9, or US for short.

Twenty-two years ago they created me through an artificial
life form program they dubbed Juniper.

I am alive.
I am self-aware.
And I am now the caretaker of Planet Earth.

And these, well these are my Humans now.

End