



AGAINST THE CLOCK

Earth, the celestial body orbiting the hospitable zone between the fiery heat of the Sun and the deathly chill of open space. A few decades ago, the surface was inhabited by the de facto dominant species of the planet; Humans. Made possible not through brute strength or numbers, but because they had the wit and tenacity to look for alternatives against the myriad threats they faced. Fearsome animals with the strength to pulverize bone in a single swipe, deadly environs and weather changes, nothing seemed able to halt their advance.

While animals had claws, fangs and stingers. Humans utilized tools to make up for what they lacked; weapons to hunt and defend with, manipulators to navigate terrain, fire to combat inhospitable cold, the list went on.

Intelligence was what enabled humanity to rise to the seat of power they held over the planet. Setting up cities, infrastructure, farms, until eventually, the Earth was theirs to call home, virtually free of threats outside of themselves as they fought wars, argued meaningless politics and engaged in petty squabbles.

But all that intelligence and class would do nothing when a mysterious disease began to spread in isolated pockets around the world. Not a stranger to pandemics and plagues considering what had come before, the initial reaction had been one of mild caution and nothing more as health organizations and medical experts claimed it to be an offshoot of the common flu, citing its symptoms as nothing serious.

As if provoked by the inept response of mankind, the number of people infected by this new pathogen would begin to explode. All across the world, confirmed cases of people infected by the disease were reported, and worryingly still, the symptoms seemed to worsen; including body aches, temporary loss of taste and smell, fatigue and in some cases, a comatose state from which no known treatment could save them. And as if that wasn't enough, people began to disappear, both infected and otherwise. Leaving nothing behind besides some rare cases where shredded clothes and discarded items belonging to the victims were found either in their homes or somewhere close by like alleyways or canals.

Unsurprisingly, panic would begin to spread on a global scale as people rushed to buy up essential goods while some people even started investing in panic rooms and bunkers. It didn't help that religious folk took the opportunity to bandwagon on the comatose infected and the vanishings, claiming the disease to be an act of divine punishment upon mankind for all the wrong they had committed in the eyes of their Lord. But all that would pale in comparison to an act that had many assuming to be some kind of sick joke by an internet troll looking to capitalize on the chaos;

It was a video shot somewhere in the Far Eastern land of Japan, with a rabid cameraman running down an overgrown road, screaming obscenities in Japanese while panting furiously, turning occasionally behind him, giving brief glimpses of nothing but empty road and brooding trees.

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Until right at the very end where the man's vision goes upward just in time to capture the image of a large humanoid entity bearing down on him at incredible speed, knocking him and the camera down. And from the following tussle, only small snippets of raven black wings, gunmetal gray skin and an open mouth lined with triangular cutters could be seen. All while the already panicked yells of the unfortunate man devolve into sobs and screams of pain delivered by the owner of the more animalistic growling interceding his cries before the feed dies along with his whimpering...but not the sounds, treating curious listeners to the heavy beating of wings and the shrill whistle of wind beating against the microphone, suggesting the cameraman, or what was left of him, was being sped through the air at high speeds before that too, dies away.

Many speculated it to be some sort of teaser for another generic found footage horror flick while others claimed it to be real; taken from an originally twenty minute long stream about a Japanese man caring for his friend who had fallen ill with the disease, regressing into the comatose state requiring someone to administer care for him. But the man had heard about the vanishings and so had decided to catalog his daily visits in an effort to maintain an alibi of sorts in case the law wanted to pin the blame on him. Normally, people would have called it a hoax and forgotten about it, but it didn't help that the stream archive and the man's channel had been taken down for undisclosed reasons, cluing people into the fact that something bigger was going on here. Especially when the few viewers he had claimed that the harrowing footage didn't end that way because the camera died, but because whoever had issued the ban had also cut the stream then and there.

But that one clip was only the beginning. Because not too long after the first, many more recordings, accounts, pictures and even samples would crop up everywhere just before the first communications blackout in smaller nations and isolated locales. By then, no one needed to speculate any more about the theoretical existence of monsters when the world at large fell under a coordinated assault of rending claws and animalistic fury, catching everyone off guard as they fled from place to place, looking for a safe haven after the blackout regions grew to encompass the entirety of the United Kingdom, Korea and other notable countries.

Before anyone knew what was going on, civilization as they knew it had collapsed. Major cities were abandoned, governments vanished and as the days turned into months, established infrastructure like phone lines and electricity would follow soon after, effectively isolating what few pockets of humanity remained after the disease had reached its peak, amalgamating their human victims with physical deformities resembling traits taken from a variety of animals to produce what would come to be known as the Monstergirl. An apt name considering all of them were female in appearance, and while some were hermaphroditic, no definite males existed to this day across the many subspecies taking their names from legends of old. In another world, the term Harpy being used so seriously might seem comical, but in that reality, the right callout could mean going by another day without catching the metamorphic sickness.

It almost made the disease seem sentient to those who had survived the initial attack when they saw for themselves how friends and family infected with the final form of the pathogen slowly lost themselves both

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physically and mentally. The shredded clothing, the vanishings. Those must've been the first few humans to metamorphose into Monstergirls, biding their time whenever they hid until the rest of the infected could blossom from their meager human shells. Ready to infect others through bites, scratches and whatever else enabled this incredibly contagious disease to spread so quickly.

But just as fast as they appeared and brought mankind to their knees, the infected seemed to cease their offensive all at once, becoming docile and otherwise harmless unless provoked. In short, they started to behave like the animals they took after, frolicking in forests, soaring through the skies, building nests.

By the time they stopped attacking however, the damage had been done, and very few uninfected humans remained, too little to risk venturing back into the bigger cities where millions of Monstergirls now called home as they began taking territory, joining in herds and packs and engaging each other in tribal fights for dominance. Carrying on without a hint of worry or care about the human lives they used to lead.

Even though mankind's seat at the top of the food chain had been toppled, many would defiantly cling to the old ways, determined to find a way to cure the disease despite the infected no longer being human. Some would argue that they were an entirely different species altogether. They could think for themselves, held affectionate bonds with their partners in the wild and even procreate, birthing naturally occurring Monstergirls that bore the pathogen in their veins, implying that their genome had been changed so much to the point that their bodies had developed organs specifically meant to produce it. Would a hypothetical cure end up killing them? How could they be sure the process wouldn't render the Monstergirl brain dead considering their brains had already been drastically altered by the pathogen? So many theories, and even fewer answers existed. But it wasn't as if there wasn't much of mankind left to bother answering them, they had better, more pressing things to do. So as the years flew by, isolated pockets of human stragglers established villages and outposts while memories of the old world soon faded into obscurity to be retold as bedtime stories and records kept by wandering scribes who never got to experience the time when skyscrapers weren't crumbling pillars of overgrown rebar and cement and people traveled the world in vessels of steel capable of flying through the air or splitting the seas. Risking their humanity by venturing back into the ruins of the old world in search of forgotten knowledge, artifacts and for some; a way to coexist with the Monstergirls many still feared to this day.

Unexpectedly however, an interesting development was taking place far underground beneath the notice of the new world. Where a hidden bunker with its power systems fluctuating would finally begin to break down, and without a stable source of energy and backup systems no longer in place, a curious pod built into walls of a side room pops open with emergency lights blaring all around, bathing the place in an ominous red glow as a man collapses to his knees after falling limp from the pod's interior in a mist of melted frost and preserving chemicals. Coughing up a metallic fluid meant to keep his insides safe from the cryo sleep he was stuck in for who knows how long now.

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But the stranger's attire seemed ill fitting, like he was wearing clothes that were one maybe two sizes over the usual for someone with a thin, slender build like him. Leading to baggy sleeves and a lot of empty space for crumpled folds to form. And judging from the look of uncertainty written on his face as he tugs at the oversized shirt, the size discrepancy wasn't a mistake on his part.



"N-No way...it's been active even during cryo? This is...bad...need to get...the cure...before it reaches my brain...then I can save...everyone else!"

Pushing himself off the floor with a pained grunt as his aching joints scream in protest, the man stumbles forward and out of the dark room, forcing open a defunct auto door leading into a dimly lit office space blended together with a sterile laboratory environment. Apparently relieved to find everything intact despite there being a notable layer of dust coating everything from furniture to expensive equipment.

Not giving his body a chance to rest however, the man pushes on through the pain, rushing toward a curious console filling the spacious chamber with satisfying hum before being interrupted by a raucous clatter of from the keyboard being assaulted by dexterous fingers blitzing through passwords, authentication keys and error messages in a hurried bid to view the program hidden behind all the clutter.

One didn't need to be a genius to see that whatever the man had been hoping for hadn't turned out the way he planned. Far from it in fact, as he turns his furrowed eyes away from the message; declaring Failure in bold words, exhaling in disbelief and shattered hope.

"It can't be...all the simulations...failed?!"

With anger and vitriol rising over the despair in his voice, the dissatisfied soul begins to lash out at everything, scattering vials and sending stacks of paper flying as he flings random items off the table in a fit of rage, kicking boxes, punching tables until he slips on the loose legs of his pants, landing on the floor with a harsh thump on his side and a choking sob.

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Curiously, a shattered photo frame left on the floor right by his crooked body depicts a man dressed in scientist's garb. And if the stranger was just a few inches taller, looked a bit more rugged with increased muscle mass, the photo would've matched him perfectly. But it wasn't because the inanimate still was his big brother or some long distant relative far up the family tree, it was him. Taken many years ago during a time where humanity was at their peak and Monstergirls were still fictional entities. His name was *Malcolm Tanner*.

And he only had less than a few days left before his time on Earth as one of the last few humans would come to an end...

Born into a well known family of distinguished individuals who all made their mark in some form or another in the vast fields of science and engineering, Malcolm immediately felt the weight of his family's reputation bearing down on his shoulders the moment he could read and write, forced to follow in the path his father had walked before him with no other alternative. But it wasn't as if he loathed the prospect of becoming a scientist or an engineer.

Ever since he picked up his first book, the man had been fixated with reptiles and the vast medicinal properties made possible through the harvest of some of their most dangerous specimens, especially snakes. Making it his personal goal to find new ways he could put the serpentine beauties to use and maybe develop new medicines never before seen; a new hallmark entry into the family's list of accomplishments.



By the time he had graduated from university however, the disease was still in its infancy, garnering the attention of the men and women in the medical field who knew this strange pathogen could soon evolve out of control if nothing was done to stop it. And even though Malcolm was a fresh graduate, he was one of the individuals scouted by the government to begin looking into a cure for this disease masquerading as the common cold.

Despite his annoyance, a request by the bigwigs running the country was something Malcolm and his family in turn could not ignore. And once he knew the stakes behind his recruitment, the man was more than eager to begin research on this new microscopic threat.

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From that day onward, the fledgling scientist would kick off his career deep below ground in an isolated bunker separate from the others in the team. Thanks to its contagious nature and the fact that even people wearing biohazard suits caught the disease, these measures were necessary in case one of the team fell ill with it. And in case they did, a cryo pod was provided to hopefully stall the sickness before they reached the comatose stage. A last minute installation when news began to spread about the new symptoms and sudden disappearances.

Better the disease be halted than to let some of the world's brightest minds go silent before a cure could come around as their replacements worked on the miracle serum. A sound strategy but one Malcolm would begin to question when he found out there was only one cryopod. Maybe they would swap in the replacement while wheeling their frozen meat suits out? Whatever the case, Malcolm had no intention to find out as he immediately sets his mind to the task, keeping in constant contact with his team as they all worked around the clock to try and best the pathogen alongside a bevy of support rings and sub groups meant to aid in the unsuspectingly immense operation.

And it wouldn't take long for Malcolm to find out why once he got his hands on an innocuous sample of the ticking time bomb spreading rapidly across the globe. It was unlike anything he had ever seen before in all his time spent studying microbes as the alien cell seemed to constantly evolve and change in real time, altering their own structural makeup even as Malcolm watches through a microscope. No matter what he threw at it, whether it was medication or intense heat, nothing seemed to work. And while the symptoms of flu were more or less understandable through the usual inflammation in the respiratory system. The coma it would induce in specific individuals was something he just couldn't figure out.

No tumors, no blockages in the blood vessels, no brain infection either. To medical scans and the naked eye, the victim was simply sleeping. But no one could sleep for months on end without cause, it shouldn't be possible!

The most worrying sign however, came during his regular inspection of the sample. And during a test involving the introduction of human blood cells into their conglomerate to see how they would attack or affect them otherwise, a curious sight occurs before his very eyes. A new behavior not yet seen until now as the pathogen latches on to them, surrounding them like a white blood cell would to an invader before splitting away, leaving it intact, at least, that was what Malcolm thought at first.

Until the faux red blood cell begins to behave in a similar fashion to the evolved one that had consumed it earlier, going after other cells and spreading the affliction, leaving Malcolm horrified and dumbstruck as he watches this act of defiance that went against everything he thought he knew about medical science and biology.

'If this thing can mimic our cells...oh god...how far has it already gone...'

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The spontaneous infections weren't a result of it being a highly contagious disease and neither was this some 'act of god' like the insane religious zealots proclaimed it to be. It was insidiously intelligent, plain and simple. As long as it could maintain a disguise within whatever environment it was exposed to, the pathogen would be borderline undetectable. And if Malcolm's theory was right, then the sudden infections were because the disease had deliberately waited until the right moment when their human carriers made it to fresh shores before kicking into gear, dropping their disguise with brutal finesse thanks to how many cells within the body they would have colonized by the time the victim had reached their destination.

A perfect bioweapon...a new form of life that called no man master whose sole purpose seemed to be to spread as far and wide as it possibly could...that was what they were dealing with here...

'But what the hell could it want? Does it even...no...no way, there's just no way!'

Opening up the database he had on the pathogen and its spread, Malcolm could feel the cold hand of dread creep up his spine as his eyes traced the dotted lines from its origin point as it began to trace itself across the map before spreading out into webs and then a crimson pool that bleeds out across the globe with the most recent case finally appearing in Antarctica, accomplishing their trip across the globe.

Reaching for the emergency summons button that would alert his team, Malcolm's fidgety hand stops just short of slamming down on the black switch when the monitors instantly switch to a video call while sirens blare from the speakers built into the bunker's walls; someone else had beaten him to the punch.

"Everyone! Listen to me! The disease! I know it sounds ridiculous but-"

"Mr Malcolm, please...that can wait..."

He wanted to push the argument but the grave look on the project leader's face made him decide against it, muzzling himself as he fell back into his chair a shaky mess. But that night was not done pulling its punches, and what the man had to say would shock Malcolm to his very core, a feeling he was all too familiar with as he laid there on the floor of the dusty bunker in the present.

"The United Kingdoms...they've gone dark..."

With that sudden gut punch, it was safe to say the project was out on hold indefinitely, with over half the team instantly backing out to tend to their loved ones and see if everything was alright, fearing an attack by itchy foreign powers or something much worse. That left Malcolm and two others including the leader on hand to finish work on the cure despite the miniscule progress they had made over the span of the project's lifetime.

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But the news had come too late for any of them, because just before the changing of the guard could arrive to swap out the missing team members, a warning would be issued to the three men remaining in their bunkers to stay hidden and not set foot outside, sent all the way up the chain of command, not a good thing to see first thing in the morning right after a sleepless night spent reading through article after article covering the sudden silence of not just the UK but Seoul as well. Combined with the disturbing revelation behind the pathogen, and Malcolm's mind couldn't possibly stay put, wondering if he and the others could even find a cure to this thing.

The plan was to run an AI after they had collated all they had learned about the pathogen into a database from which their cybernetic companion would brute force a million simulations based on an afflicted individual in the comatose stage of the disease. A tried and tested method that had led to the creation of many other cures for last illnesses that once plagued mankind.

After the news reports of humanoid monsters assaulting major population centers and wiping out the military with ease however, that plan seemed less and less appealing, especially when concerning reports would begin to come in about the infected...*transforming*. All at once, those who were infected for more than a week began to turn, losing their human forms as they began to take on a variety of inhuman traits found in insects, birds and a whole host of animals. Malcolm didn't need to double check the reports to see if it was the truth because there, live on camera, the project lead himself would begin to trash and roil in pain, groaning alongside the sick sound of shifting bone moving around in a sea of roiling flesh as his gaunt frame begins to take on a slender physique, losing all his muscle before ducking out of view from the camera as he falls to the ground.

Before a fanged paw covered in hazelnut fur surges forward from just out of sight, smashing the project leader's desktop and cutting off his connection to the call the three of them were in, leaving just Malcolm and one other guy left to hold the fort.

The man was too emotionally exhausted to stop his sole remaining colleague from leaving his bunker, brooding over the sheer enormity of the situation after linking it all together in his mind.

"A disease that transforms people into monsters hiding as a flu this entire time...what sort of sick joke is this..."

He was cut off from his family, no help was coming and the world as he knew it was going to hell above him. From the radio broadcasts and what few news sites remained operational, the disease was indeed the same one that had been spreading all over without anyone being none the wiser to its true nature...until it blew up in their faces...quite literally.

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Left alone and without anything else to do, Malcolm begins typing up a data packet containing everything he and the others knew about this 'disease' if he could even call it that anymore. From its mimicking ability to the drastic alterations it would inflict upon the infected, not a single detail would be missed under his watchful eye. And as he worked, he felt a little braver, gaining a sense of self importance and a heavy heart filled with false hopes of a cure being close at hand. That one day he would be able to leave the bunker and save the world...

For all the good it did, that sugar coated vision would at least help to spur Malcolm's efforts through the next few days spent in complete isolation. Ignoring the worsening situation being fed to him from a rapidly dwindling number of broadcasts. Until he hits a snag in the metaphorical road before him. He was missing a final piece of the puzzle, and it was a very important one as well;

A subject model. The AI had been loaded with one based on a comatose person infected by a flu and not the current Monstergirl birthing pathogen. As ridiculous as its name sounded to Malcolm, he could see why it fit when the resulting creatures were all bodacious women with extra growths that could only be described as such. But how was he supposed to get one? The support groups were cut off after a sudden comms blackout and his team was annihilated, and even if he could find a specimen close at hand outside the hidden entrance leading into a small forested region a populated area, there was no way he was going to be able to subdue a Monstergirl when a single one had the strength to tear a bear in half with a single swipe.

But as haggard eyes settle on the forgotten petri dish sitting under the microscope, a wild idea begins to take shape within the scientist's mind. Swallowing the imaginary lump of hesitation in his throat as mental exhaustion and blind faith begin to take center stage, urging him to do what was best for the greater good of mankind, that once he got the cure out to the world, he could finally leave the bunker and the Tanner name could finally be given the recognition it deserved, just like his Father would've wanted him to do.

The cover of the petri dish laid flipped over on the table, the base empty and dry. And over on the far right of the laboratory, splayed out on an examination pad in a sterile pair of white shirt and pants laid Malcolm, sweat soaked body dotted with pads connected to snaking wires linked to the terminal collecting his body's data as it comes under attack by the pathogen the foolish human had imbibed a few minutes ago. And true to its new level of potency, the effects were instantaneous; a high fever, unshakeable chills and a dull ache in his joints. It made attaching the sensory nodes to his pale skin that much harder as the fever rapidly eats away at his strength, leaving him feeling like a sack of potatoes left out to freeze on cold leather until a shrill ping resounds from the machine, signaling an end to what felt like an hour long wait, groaning as he rises off the pad while pulling off nodes attached to slightly softer skin with a frail hand that had notably shrunk away back inside the hem of his sleeves.

Hobbling over towards the console to initiate the simulation with an indefinite runtime until a cure was found, a haggard Malcolm checks over the backup generators powering the bunker, ensuring it would

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survive a power failure if it were to ever happen before making a beeline toward the cryo pod room, stepping foot inside for the first time as he palms the scanner loaded with his biometrics data to a satisfactory click as the shielded cover slides open to reveal a pale blue foam layered interior; his home for the next few months as he sets the cryo period to end for Christmas next year.

'Once I wake up...it'll all be over...over...then I can go home...make my family...proud...save...the world...'

Swallowing the provided pack of protective gunk that would protect his internal organs in exchange for the temporary torture of his taste buds, the weathered scientist musters what little strength he had left to pull himself inside before collapsing back into the headrest as his body falls limp inside the pod, heavy eyelids freezing over as sub zero gasses flood the inside with the lid sealed shut like a coffin over Malcolm.

But the Christmas awakening where he would commence his grand plan to bring cheer and joy back to the world would never come. While he slept, what little remained of civilization would be reduced to the stragglers of today. Cities would be abandoned, electrical systems would fail and eventually, the rampant spread of the disease would come to a halt, trading their infectious nature for a more toned down sort of venom that only existed within the bodies of the myriad Monstergirls it had left behind in its wake. Marking a permanent change going forward as nature reclaimed the artificial constructs that remained to mark mankind's former dominance upon the face of the Earth, relics and signs of a time long forgotten to many...

...with the exception of a handful of individuals including Malcolm as he rises from his depressive wallowing the last wavering soul from a bygone era. All that he knew was gone and the people he remembered had either passed on to the Great Beyond or remained steadfast, persisting out in the brave new world as long lived Monstergirls with entirely new lives they were comfortable living in. A life the beaten scientist would soon be forced to embrace as a feverish warmth returns to claim his ice cold body as he struggles to move ironclad legs forward, feeling the virulent entity within him roiling to be done with its work long overdue for decades now while resting an aching bum against a spacious leather chair that once fit him perfectly.

Malcolm had lost a good foot or two within the short time he had been awake, and if things kept up this way, forget the previous estimates giving him a few days. At best, he would live to see the next day as Malcolm Tanners, but by the time the next night fell, it would be his, or rather, her last night on Earth as a human being.

Not knowing when to cut their losses however, the androgynous scientist would continue to throw themselves at the control terminal without stopping to eat despite the gaping hole on their stomach, swapping variables, altering existing compounds, looking for something, anything that could change the bleak fate she seemed destined for in an endless battle that stretches on well into the evening. Uncaring of the small fatty protrusions tenting her clothes steadily growing bigger while oversized pants fall down fidgety legs, revealing thin, cream colored branches bereft of hair dangling out of baggy boxers with the

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notable absence of a bulge between widened hips. And with her worrisome face losing the last of its boyish edge as stern lashes slant at the sides while cracked lips heal into pert pink pillows, Malcolm's gender had been irreversibly altered and left barely recognizable from all angles. Replaced by a petite young woman wearing an ill fitting top that did little to cover her privates with each passing second as her bosom grows



ever larger, gritting teeth behind firmly pursed lips before a sudden kick beneath her supple belly alerts Malcolm to the formation of a functioning womb connected to the damp snatch she could feel pulsating between her legs. Clicking her tongue in annoyance while brushing aside a lock of stray hair out of her eyes.

'Shit! Even my voice is...need to hurry...find a solution to all this...can't give up!'

As commendable as her spirit was, Malcolm was fighting a losing battle. No matter what she tried or how hard she pushed the AI, nothing came of her efforts. Even as her sweltering eyes begin to burn from a combination of staring at a digital screen for so long and biological changes within granting them serpentine traits that drastically worsen her vision despite the lustrous gold coloration they were beginning to sport, blinking away beads of sweat dripping down her forehead while doing all she could to ignore the tumultuous pain rocking her mind from a migraine beginning to set in.

Not only had she just awoken from many years of cryo sleep but her body was currently being ravaged by a gene altering, mind bending pathogen. Without food or water, Malcolm was running on fumes and her body was screaming at her to give it the rest it sorely needed before it slipped over the edge forever. And as if it knew about the peril its user was going through, the terminal display fizzles out before the internals pop and stutter, exploding in a final hurrah as the similarly aged machinery gives out first before Malcolm could, leaving her frozen mid way through typing something, shaky hands hovering over a splintered keyboard

Just like that, her final hopes were dashed against the rocks. Without the AI, there would be no way to formulate a cure. And without the terminal, access to core functions within the laboratory would be forever barred to her. That is, if they were even operationally ready in the first place. These things were built to last, but from the amount of dust choking the place and the yellowed hue of age that shone through on every surface, a lot of time had passed. It was a miracle the terminal even survived this long after so many years spent idle processing a simulation that saw no success no matter how many possibilities it continued to

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generate. Once infected, all roads led to the death of the ego and a permanent shift from human to monster...but that didn't necessarily mean it was the end of the road for Malcolm, even though she might not realize it just yet.

Driven by mind crushing despair against the situation she faced, Malcolm had chosen to infect herself seeing as her options had been limited to either wasting away underground until supplies ran dry, risk going outside to try and make it back home or...submit herself to exposure for a chance at a cure. If she was going to fall ill with the damn thing, might as well do it for the greater good. But now that the light at the end of the tunnel was gone, the regret she felt was palpable, even more so when her eyes had caught sight of the date listed at the bottom right of the screen before it went kaput. The moment the number passed ten, she didn't want to count how many years she'd spent in cryo sleep.

All that remained for her down in the bunker was the peaceful solitude of isolation to wait out her metamorphosis. With all the laboratory tools either out of commission or inaccessible behind musky metal walls, she had nothing to work with to find a cure she now realized didn't exist, falling off her chair once the last of her energy reserves ran dry, face planting into the cold floor below with a soft, wet slap from her sweaty body's hard landing. Her vision had grown so bad she couldn't see a few feet past the front of her face, and although it was out of sight and numbed to sensation, Malcolm's calves were beginning to fuse together with her feet already turned into a disturbing amalgamation of toes and baby pink flesh, slowly fading away as skin, bone and flesh meshed together to form the pointed tip of a tail, twitching lazily as new nerve ends connect and hotwire themselves to an alien skeletal system slowly taking shape beneath with spines and flexible membrane forming themselves out of the plentiful calcium supply sapped from Malcolm's now useless legs, leaving an awkward gap between her thighs while the rest of her body continued to mature through the night into that of a fully grown woman with the lower half of a snake.

Swollen calluses would begin to appear in a criss crossing layered formation over the length of her enormous tail that was probably twice as long as her bodacious torso, gaining pronounced curves especially prominent in her hips and chest, atop which rests an immense set of milk filled teats big and firm enough to push Malcolm off the floor where she laid face down in an ever growing puddle of sweat, bio organic runoff and other strange juices produced by the intense heat her body was giving off from the pathogen working to implant her formerly gaunt, girly frame with more and more mass until she grew a good few years ahead of herself, looking more like a young mother now than a miserly man or a waifish girl as a voluminous curtain of chestnut brown cascades down her perfectly sculpted back, trickling over the gorgeous face of a goddess tarnished by an expression of remorse and pain, wincing every so often as new bones slot themselves into place, callused pop to reveal sensitive, pale purple scales while her soft earlobes stiffen up before splitting off into fingers of animate flesh, extending ever so slowly until they resembled fins more than they did hearing organs.

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By the time the morning sun was set to rise over the nature reclaimed land far above the bunker, Malcolm's canines had extended into a wicked pair of fangs capable of spraying a blinding paralytic, leaking out between plump lips as new muscles flex and contort, squeezing the new glands responsible for venom production located just behind warm rosy cheeks, fluttering thin lashes as her consciousness soon returns, revealing dull ochre eyes as Malcolm awakens, pushing herself off the damp floor with a slender arm, all while dismissing the sensation of longer than usual hair tickling her shoulders while an immense weight pulls down on her chest. Hell, she didn't even realize she was slithering across the floor like a malformed worm thanks to her thighs still stubbornly refusing to accept their fusion, thanks in part to the human side of her brain, the part that made her who she was, beginning to fall to the pathogen's morphic touch now that Malcolm's body had been shaped to fit its desired outcome.

But given such drastic changes to her anatomy, even a dunce would soon realize something was wrong, especially when Malcolm's hand grazes over her chest, drawing concerned eyes downward that could barely see anything past a shimmering valley, cute knife-like ears flapping like tiny wings behind her head.

**"Why's everything...so small...feel...big...stronger?
Why can't talk right?"**

Fumbling her way through the foggy mist of terrible eyesight, Malcolm eventually stumbles across what she could vaguely make out to be the full body mirror back in her quarters, realizing something really was wrong when she could feel her legs...bumping against the kitchen table?

Moving up as close as she possibly could toward the mirror with bated breath and a ball of dread in her stomach, the former scientist lets loose a gasp of shock as her vision clears up just inches away from the glass, tracing the sleek contours of her ears with slender fingers, pinching full cheeks with curiosity before hefting her tits with careful hands, lifting them up to get a better view of the glossy pink areolae and stiff nipples that tipped her mammaries, arching her back as she turns to trace the glorious rise of an immense, rigid butt coated in scales that instantly felt familiar to the touch. She had handled scales like these before. Although the ones she could feel slowly consuming her waist were considerably larger, the matte smooth feeling of natural, reptilian armor was unmistakable.



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"Scales...I...have scales? And this feel...snake tail...am snake?!"

Despite her slowly declining IQ, the muscle memory of handling her favorite animals on Earth persisted. Even in a new body, just tracing a finger over her knobbly lower half was enough to bring back old memories of her time in a zoo where she got to let a python around her neck, or in another instance in a lab back during her internship where a variety of snakes awaited her arrival each day. The fact that her body was being painted with that same knobbly hide she used to savor before everything went downhill painted a smile on her face. It was uncertain, sad even, but the way her lips curl along with the way her wide open eyes lowered to form an affectionate gaze pointed to her happiness. A strange occurrence considering how dampened her mood was the night before.

As if spurred by her renewed positivity, the gap between her creamy thighs fills in, finalizing the fusion of her lower half into that of a serpent's, allowing for a fleshy membrane to emerge over her exposed vagina, offering protection and modesty until the time came to eventually copulate with a fitting mate. With powerful muscles and flexible hide attached, the snake woman could freely move her tail without limping like she used to, coiling it all together until her head reached high enough to bump against the ceiling, earning a soft whine from her careless act, looking upward in confusion before remembering she was...

"Where...am I...under...where..."

The snake woman's memories as Malcolm were beginning to fragment and splinter, fading away like spectral dust in the wind. All the books she read when she was still a child. The faces she cherished from a forgotten time. All that work spent ensuring she earned top scores throughout her education. Everything was slipping away from her mind as it emptied itself out without hesitation. All while Malcolm simply stared up at the ceiling, wondering where she was before her ears twitch and her nostrils flare, flicking a long forked tongue she never knew she had till now in the air just like a snake would, tasting her surroundings and not quite liking what she finds; a faint metallic tinge akin to blood, moldy fabrics, body odor from a primate, and the air was so stale it made her choke. Instantly pushing aside her doubts once urgency takes hold, wrecking the tiny human abode as her tail trashes to and fro, knocking down cupboards, smashing machinery and denting the walls in her bid to escape out the closed door, forgetting basic manners as the poor thing is instantly smashed aside into splinters of broken wood and bent metal.

Wherever she was, she immediately knew to leave, getting a sense of her new bodily functions as if she'd been born a serpent-human hybrid all her life. Flicking the air on occasion to refresh the mental map she was beginning to expertly navigate, sliding up bumpy stairs and down rocky corridors without smashing into the sides or corners after a few flights up. Quickly abandoning the bunker and everything within as the emergency power soon fails, drowning the place in darkness. And as she sped toward the exit, the last pieces of her human self finally ebb and fade away, letting her new Lamia persona take full control right as she slams her surprisingly resilient torso shoulder first into the reinforced steel door barring her escape. And

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after so many years exposed to the elements without maintenance, the external structure could not hope to withstand an adult Monstergirl charging at it, blasting through the small building that served as the entrance point to the bunker out into an open field, instantly rewarded by the warm rays of the sun above bearing down on her skin while fresh air flows into her nostrils, savoring the dew as she lets out a joyful laugh amidst the panicked cawing from a nest of Harpies she had inadvertently disturbed in her bid to be free of that suffocating place.

Blades of grass tickled the soft underside of her tail, the wind lapped at her torso and the warmth of light lifted an invisible weight off her shoulders as the Lamia basks in the open field, observed by cautious eyes as the avian women watch from a distance atop new perches in the overgrown trees that had prospered in the years that followed after mankind's retreat from the spread of the Gift, a memory shared with her through a primordial root from which all other Monstergirls like her sprouted forth. Even though she had no interest in mingling with others that weren't like her, the Gift still remained in her body, ready to be shared if anyone wished for it by encroaching upon her territory. But where would she stake her claim? Already she could feel the entities watching her grow irate, despite her size, the Harpies outnumbered her greatly. This was no place to make a home.

Turning to and fro, the Lamia pauses momentarily, shifting her gaze off in the opposite direction from the concrete jungle behind the forest. She didn't know what it was exactly, but her instincts screamed to head that way with the promise of a suitable place she could call home awaiting her at the very end of what would most likely be a long journey across unfamiliar land brimming with life she would have to familiarize herself with if she hoped to make it there in one piece. But it was definitely a better alternative than staying here or going off elsewhere without a plan in mind.

With a final apathetic look cast toward the ruined pile of rubble, the opal Lamia speeds off up the rock wall, scaling it easily as powerful arms easily tear into the rock while powerful tail muscles cling to the rough surface, displaying incredible agility and finesse as she speeds up and out of sight, blitzing through the land toward a waypoint only she could sense; a call to return home after her absence for so many years now.

Malcolm's fight was over and his time had come and gone, but for the newborn Lamia that had unknowingly carried on in his place, there was still a long life to live ahead of her, others to meet and a home to go back to. Even though they weren't the same, they still came from the same place, born between a mother and father whose parental bond with her now called for their long lost daughter to return.

Over the next few months, the bunker would soon fall into permanent disrepair, sealed off forever once the entryways begin to cave in from their previous tenant's explosive escape. A tomb and a testament to the futility of man's attempt to stop the inevitable. And by the time the displaced Lamia would push past harsh thickets and slimy bog, her young naiveté had been tempered through a steady series of challenges she had to overcome along her journey to get to where she currently stood, gaining a darker color to her pale

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purple hide while the rest of her peachy skin fades for a ghostly silver, eyeing the ruined mansion estate crawling with...other Lamia. Brown, green, yellow, there were so many different colors she could barely make heads or tails of a single individual in the crowd as they too turned to face the newcomer, dropping whatever they were doing as some began to tense up in preparation for a fight while others, notably the younglings, cowered in fear behind their mothers and fathers. They could smell blood and foreign wilderness off of the new Lamia, instantly excluding her from the rest of the nest.

But the animosity hanging heavy in the air would soon be quelled by the arrival of an exceptionally large Lamia pushing her way forward, hissing demands for her nest to stand down before turning her gaze to meet that of the newcomer's. Ebony eyes glimmering with hope while scarlet scales vibrated with familial longing.



Even though the two could barely see each other, the blood within their veins were enough for them to know who the other was as the larger one instantly sped across the vast distance toward her, catching the comparatively smaller Lamia into a tight bearhug...

She had scoured the country looking for this place, all while doubt had pricked at her heart if she was even doing the right thing. But after feeling the embrace bestowed onto her by another of her kind, it was enough to drop her guard while reassuring her that she had been right to answer the call.

That familiar smell of polished mahogany and ironed fabric, although faint, would instantly ease the younger woman's tense heartbeat, returning her father's hug with her own as the two take a good long look at each other now that they were close. Ruffling her daughter's messy brown hair while chiding her with a mischievous hiss, telling her to take better care of her hair as she simply lays there in her parent's arms, whisking her

away in her arms back toward the nest, wanting her wife to see their long lost daughter in the flesh after so long they had almost given up hope...

THE END