

## Mindframe

(A Short Story by T. U.-P.)

“It’s time to take your correctives, PH4!” A female robotic voice shouts out through a speaker located close to a small bed in a 20 x 20 x 20 foot cell.

Immediately after, a forty-year-old man resting on the bed in his white boxed abode lethargically props himself up and plants both bare feet on the ground. The cell door with its minuscule window then automatically opens and the man stands up to grab and put on his pair of white rubber soled shoes. After slipping them on, he stands up in the door entrance-way ready to join a queue of other prisoners heading to the compulsory chemical correction station. When a loud beeping sound starts, the man beings to march on the spot and soon joins the tail end of the queue as it heads down the corridor of cells to his right.

“PH4! Pick up your march or you’ll be shock probed!” A male voice says from above the marchers in the corridor.

After passing through a corridor of similar boxed cells to his own, the man follows the line as it veers off to the right. A few moments later, the group stops and continues marching on the spot.

“Take one blue, one red and one white pill and line up again!” The same male voice says with a hint of sharpness in the tone. Soon, the sound of shock patrollers can be heard, rushing to the front of the queue. Upon reaching another man who is refusing to take the chemical compounds, they begin to shock his lower body with their probes. The man then falls onto the ground with a loud thud and is dragged away.

“Follow the guidelines or you’ll end up in the shock bin!” The same authoritarian voice says, louder than before.

“Proceed to Calibration Unit 16, PH4!”

After hearing the order, the man joins another queue that snakes downward toward the Artificial Intelligence Tests and Responses floor. After marching on the spot for about two minutes, a loud beeping sound begins at regular intervals to signal the inmates to proceed forward. After descending down a flight of metallic stairs, the man exits the queue to head into the assigned unit, where response time and mind channel research for brain robotics tests were ongoing.

“Please sit and put on your headset, PH4!” The voice in the unit says with a tone of systematic automation.

Upon putting the ‘brain wig’ on his head with its cables attached to a machine box next to him, he grabs a small joystick with a red button at its extremity, staring at the screen in front of him. Once the screen turns on independently, the familiar logo

flashing the letters “M” and “F” for “MindFrame” parades in front of his eyes in an animated flurry of stylized motion pixelation.

“Calibration, one... Press a button when you see wrist watches...”

“Calibration, two... Press a button when you see trees...”

“Calibration, three... Press a button when you see street signs...”

As the man follows the response time AI exercise, the headset begins to heat up and a bead of sweat runs down the side of his left cheek. After about an hour of the same repetitive and monotonous exercise, the man reaches calibration level 178. The same unwavering machine voice then says: “Thank you PH4, now we will research response time with a transcranial shock signal. When you feel the shock on your headset, press the red button, then listen to the prompts and follow the guidelines on your screen...”

As the exercise proceeds, the shocks both intensify and increase in their frequency. Soon the man begins to feel dizzy as the screen flashes different shapes and colours before his eyes in a quasi-hallucinogenic manner.

“When you see an elephant that is purple, press the button...” A robotic prompt says. “If you feel a shock, followed by a purple elephant try not to press the button...” The same voice says, causing a mild nausea to occur in the research subject.

“Thank you again PH4! You may remove your headset. Your afternoon testing and response exercises are now complete.” The voice says after a particularly prolonged and invasive last set of shocks to different parts of the research subject’s skull.

After removing the ‘brain wig’, the man stands up with mild dizziness, his head profusely sweating and his eyes blurred and over-stimulated. Following another queue, the man marches in convoluted regularity with the other inmates as they all return to their cells on Level 1.

“PH4, you are to report to Doctor Z in two hours. This is your break time!” The male voice says on the intercom as the man ascends the same flight of metallic stairs. Upon reaching his open cell, he ceases his automated march and sits down on his hard mattress to remove his shoes. He then lies down and stares up at the white ceiling with its small vent.

About an hour and fifty minutes later, the man awakes to a loud beeping sound. The intercom then blares out: “Code Black... Mess Hall... All staff report immediately!” Hearing loud shouting from two levels below, he leaves his opened cell and rushes toward the security desk down the hall to the right. Noticing that the desk is vacant due to an inmate uprising, he hops over the barrier seeing an opportunity to flee while the reinforced Plexiglas portion of the intake window has been left ajar. Reaching below the desk, the man pushes a large concealed orange button to open the electronic access to

the unit's entrance and exit. He then grabs a nurse's gown hanging on a small hook, puts it on rapidly to conceal his prisoner garb and rushes out the door.

Rushing down a long white corridor, the man reaches a second locked door. Almost ready to turn back apprehensively, he reaches into his right gown pocket and miraculously finds a staff access card. Feeling a sudden tension and surge of anxiety, he taps the card on the black sensor and the door unlocks and swings open. Suddenly, a cold chill of wintry outdoor weather his slender frame as he exits the Mind Correction Facility, located in the central wooded ravine of Trench Megacity. Picking up the pace, he exits the facility's perimeter via an open metallic gate and trudges through five centimeters of powdered snow, following a small creek bed that meanders under a derelict railway overpass to his left. Looking over his shoulder at the carceral institution's high security fences, he heads toward the urban agglomeration of skyscrapers and business towers located a few kilometers in the southward distance. Suddenly, as he treks below the old elevated rail-line with the creek to his right, a sound of loud sirens starts to break the silence of the ravine woods. Worried that he was now on the facility's radar for having missed his appointment with Doctor Z during the Mess Hall uprising, he starts to jog faster, continuing his flight along the ravine woods. Looking over his right shoulder again, he notices a series of bright scanning spotlights flashing to and fro to accompany the sound of the frenetic sirens in the snowy distance.

Continuing his push into the downtown metropolis as the sirens were dimming in the distance, he crosses the shallow creek which luckily was frozen over and takes a different snow trail on the other side that is less visible to potential 'AWOL trackers' looking for fugitive tracks in the light snow. Suddenly, the man hears a loud sound of engines and immediately hides behind a large Willow tree on the west side creek bed. As he pokes his head from behind the large furrowed tree trunk, he spots two men in white winter coats atop their respective ATVs.

"I don't see him here. He may have taken the route north instead." One says to the other.

"We'll turn back and check the north wooded passage. We'll have to warn the Bay Forge neighbourhood atop the ridge that one of our cognito-offenders from Skeltopp Correctional is on the loose and may be in their midst tonight and into the early hours of the morning."

Breathing a sigh of relief as the two ATVs speed off in the opposite direction, the man continues his southward course out of the ravine. After reaching the mouth of the river, he crosses over a small bridge and arrives at a crossroad of highways and expressways. After exiting through a small gate, he finds an overpass and opts to rest there for the rest of the night. Huddling below for warmth, he is startled as a young woman approaches him wearing layers of rags over her shoulders.

"You must be cold... I've got a propane tank just a few steps away... It will at least warm your hands." The young disheveled runaway says to him.

“Anything to thaw out my frostbitten limbs!” He replies, following her to another sheltered underpass.

“Here you are! Put your hands close to this flame! And put this wool blanket over ya!” She says kindly.

“Thanks miss! I can’t express how grateful I am for your help!”

“Watchya runnin from?”

“I fled Skeltopp tonight. They’re looking for me now. I’ll have to leave in a couple of hours after I warm up.”

“Skeltopp! Heard that place is the worst! A buddy o’ mine got sent there, when he finally got out, he was like brain-dead or somethin’!”

“I got fed up about all the mind experiments that were going on in there. They were using our minds to develop some kind of free-thinking super-computer or something. They called it the ‘Mindframe’.”

“If you need to go in a few hours, here’s a few bucks... Use it to cross the lake to get to Providence Island. There’s a whole community down there that lives under the water treatment plant in a place they call the ‘Murky Oasis’. There might even be some Skeltopp survivors camping out there too.”

“Thanks.” The man says accepting a few frosty bills in one hand while keeping the other on the propane flame.

A few hours later, using the wool blanket as a winter shawl, the man leaves the highway underpass to head over to the ferry docks. After waiting for dawn to break over the Trench Megacity waterfront, he buys a one-way ferry ticket and boards the first morning ferry to Providence Island.

The End...