

## 54 Edgewater Road (written by Josey C. Wörmann)

"Jonathan? Jonathan, where are you?!" A cold sense of fear shot chills down through Jack's spine. Just a few minutes ago his best friend had gone down the stairs to grab the bag that was supposedly hidden underneath a pile of leaves, or at least that is what Mr. G had texted him this morning.

The clear blue sky gradually darkened and large, dark grey clouds began to build up like towers of fog. Only a handful of birds were still roaming the skies, most of them had already embarked on their voyage north towards the warmer regions of Indonesia and the Pacific. Christchurch had gotten quite cold in recent months, winter really did seem to come quickly this year.

They had known each other since primary school, and Jack remembered sitting with him on the park benches during spring break and fantasizing about the things that were happening in 54 Edgewater Road. 54 Edgewater Road had always been shrouded in mystery, and nobody seemed to have any idea as to what was going on inside what used to be a steel mill back in the early 1900s. The family operating the facility was long gone as they fled the country during the riots of the early 2030s. It was a large grey building without any windows and only two small doors. The walls were almost completely overgrown with dark green ivy, and the parking spaces were covered in grass which reached up the waist of a tall basketball player.

Of course, there were many rumors surrounding the place, one more extreme than the other. The butcher, an old, white-haired man, claimed that it was used by dealers to safely sell, store and exchange their drugs, while the librarian, a young, blonde lady, took a more moderate stance, saying that it was simply abandoned, and the sporadic noises were just caused by animals. Of course, nobody knew with certainty what exactly was happening, but some people had even hinted at the possibility of the place being haunted.

Jack could not see the end of the stairway from where he was standing, so he decided to go down himself after Jonathan did not answer his question. When he arrived at the bottom, he was shocked to find that Jonathan wasn't even there anymore. But where could he possibly have gone? To the front and right there were concrete walls, only on the left could you catch a glimpse of the inside of the steel mill through the dirty glass bricks.

He spread the pile of leaves to check for the bag, but just as he set his foot on the ground to move away some leaves, he felt an unimaginable force pulling his right leg down into the concrete floor. Or was it even made of concrete? He could not tell, everything happened way too quickly – before he even knew it, he was facing the ceiling in what appeared to be some kind of laboratory. He slowly tilted his head to the left, and what he saw was frightening: A human head was dangling from a rope that was tied to a steel rod above a bed. Jack immediately recognized who the head belonged to – Jonathan. His head – or rather what was left of it – seemed to have taken on a pink-like color, just like the rest of his body which was being worked on by two robot arms.



Jack looked around, trying to figure out where the hell he was. The walls were completely covered in white tiles, each about the size of a grown man's fist. The room was lit by three long fluorescent tubes, mounted to the ceiling. There were no windows or doors, which left Jack wondering how he even ended up here. He was lying on an operating room table, Jonathan to his left, and an empty table to his right. Only moments later, Jack passed out and fell into unconsciousness. The last thing he could remember was one of the robot arms quickly moving towards him.

The clock showed 4:37 AM as Jack woke up, his bedsheets soaking wet from all his sweat. It must have been a nightmare, he thought. It was impossible for him to get back to sleep now, so he got out of bed and sat down on the couch to watch TV. He was very surprised to find that instead of the usual nighttime program, most of the channels seemed to be broadcasting live news reports. However, the presenters were not inside of their usual studios, but instead seemed to be inside of some sort of bunker. As far as he could remember, news reports had only been broadcasted out of bunkers once – during the riots of the early 2030s – but that was over forty years ago now.

*“The national government advises everyone on the South Island to stay inside their homes for the next few weeks. Especially affected are the areas on the east coast around and inside Christchurch. These creatures are attacking people whenever and wherever they can, and we have so far been informed of around twenty-seven deaths. The army has been informed about the current situation and will begin to fight these creatures shortly. We have also established contact to our partners in Australia and the U.S. and asked them for help. As of this moment, we are not sure what these creatures actually are. Our experts are still evaluating the CCTV footage, but it seems like we are dealing with some form of higher species we have never seen before.”*

Jack froze. The creatures shown in the CCTV footage looked almost identical to those he had dreamed of. Huge, muscular creatures without faces, ears, or hair. In fact, their heads very much resembled those of the household robots that had become a commodity over the last fifteen years. Were they really some form of human-robot hybrid? Scientists in Japan had been researching those for a while now, but they would never let loose evil humanoids, especially not within their allies' territory.

Was his dream real? He dialed Jonathan's number to check whether he was okay. Even after ringing a dozen times, he did not pick up the phone.