

Darvish stood in front of the large window overlooking the city streets. Splotches of green seemed to spring up between streets, houses and buildings in a random, almost too random pattern. The kind of random, but not random pattern that only a computer could possibly come up with. He held a folder in his hand, tapping it gently against his palm. It had thirty names in it. It was now his job to whittle them down to ten. *Ten victims*, he thought.

"Do you have a decision," the robotic, almost demonic voice boomed in his office.

"I do not," Darvish said. If you saw him, you'd think he was the perfect leader. Square jawed, muscular but not too muscular. A face that portrayed strength, kindness, sincerity. He could call up every one of those emotions and more on a whim. Whatever was needed to convince a public that it was his decision and the best decision possible. But making that decision, well, *not everything comes easy*, he thought.

"We need a decision," the voice said.

"mAnd can wait for five minutes," Darvish snarled.

The voice clicked, but didn't say anything. It was as if it didn't expect him to know the organization's name. To know their owner's name. *I wonder how many down there would go crazy to know they're just pieces in some computers' giant puzzle*, he thought. *Probably all of them.*

"Your five minutes is up, we need a decision," the voice said.

"Seriously? I asked for more power in my job. To be mayor in deed, not just in name. I figured I'd get to make decisions on the next flood, or the next power outage problem. But you hand me this," he holds up the folder. "And tell me to kill ten people. No reason, just pick. I require a little bit of time to think about that."

“According to our calculations, only eight may perish. Those experiments must be run. That is your reason for existing.”

He almost got angry for a second. But there was something. A hitch in the voice maybe? No, robots don't hitch. They don't get nervous, they don't flinch, do they? But there was something. A softness, a... a click.

Darvish's eyes lit up for just a moment. “You can't run these, if I don't decide, can you?”

The door to his lavish office clicked. “*You cannot leave until you decide,*” the robotic voice said.

He knew they meant it. If he decided to wait forever, they'd make him wait forever. Raise the heat in the room. Turn the fire sprinklers in the ceiling on. Fill it with such a foul rotten stench that he'd give in, pick ten names at random and execute ten people for the crime of simply existing in Experimental 37. The sad crime that they were all guilty of: the crime of living in Exel.

It was his reflection that did it. When Darvish looked across the dome, he saw a grey opaque wall, the same grey wall that everyone saw, a highway that ran around the dome like a giant hug, and a suit holding a folder. His head for a brief moment in the reflection was gone, as if the suit was empty. It stood accusing him of every non-decision and non-answer he ever gave to cameras, to news, to the citizens he had sworn to protect. Every single decision he handed down from their overlords. The reflection accused him of not doing his job.

“I'm more than a suit,” he whispered, then walked over to his desk. Darvish picked up the metal trashcan at first and threw it at the window. It slammed into it with a *thunk*, then a clatter as it fell. Discarded paper scattered around the expensive plants. The heavy fake wooden paneling. The large decorative statue that stood by the wall. “I've always hated that statue,” he grumbled. Then he walked

over and grabbed it. It was of a woman, standing in tableau. Or it was supposed to be. To Darvish, it looked more like a warped twig with boobs and hands reaching up to the sky as if in praise of something.

Holding the statue like a baseball bat, he swung hard. The window cracked. An ear-piercing alarm went off. Darvish cried out, his voice lost in the loud *chirp chirp chirp chirp* of the alarm. He fell to his knees, hands clasped over his ears.

It clicked off and then after a few moments, when his hearing had begun to recover, the voice demanded, "*Why did you do that?*"

There was no concern for his life in it's question. Just genuine curiosity. "Cause," Darvish said, still kneeling on the ground. "If I die, then you don't get your answer. You don't get your tests."

"That is flawed logic, Darvish." There was a click. Then the door to his office swung open. *"Your test Darvish has been concluded. Thank you."*

"That's it? You tell me to pick ten people to die out of thirty names, and I don't and now it's over? Are these people going to die?" Then he looked back towards the town. "Of course they are," he said, answering his own question. "Did I kill them? If I picked them out, would you have," he didn't even finish the question. He knew the answer.

The cold, unseeing computer that controlled the voice, as Darvish called it, watched him. It recorded his every moment. How he sat down at his chair, how long he sat there, staring up at the ceiling, opened up the drawer where he hid the whiskey, how far he pulled the drawer open, how stared at the bottle, then closed the drawer again. How he walked to the window. It didn't stop him when he kicked the glass out, but measured the strength he used to kick it with. How far back he stepped to make his kick.

The computer watched and measured. How far out into the air he stepped. How far he fell. How fast. It measured how high he bounced after striking the lawn. The computer measured all of these things and calculated how hard he struck, then stored it in a file along with his time of death, his means of death, how long he lived. It saved it in a file with the computers actual name for the man: D475158.