

I looked ahead of me. Nothing. I looked behind me. Still nothing. It was a bright and sunny day, and I wasn't alone. I was at school, with a whole lot of other people, to get my stuff that I had left in the building. So why did I get the feeling that I was unsafe? I looked around. No one else seemed uneasy. So I shrugged off the feeling of fear, and continued getting my stuff. We were all distanced.

I passed a few people, a mix of parents and students, in the halls when I went to the office. I didn't pay them much mind; they were just other people who went to the school, minding their own business. The feeling still remained. I walked into the office. The COVID protocols were maintained as ever. Only a certain number of people were allowed inside the building at a time, and physical distancing rules were everywhere. I went back to my classroom, the STEM room, and continued to pack my stuff, checking countless times to make sure I didn't forget anything. I was strangely alert for some reason, although I couldn't really see a reason to be. Everything seemed like a normal day.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, my seemingly unfounded fears were confirmed to be for a good reason, as the principal suddenly came on the PA system. We were all kind of confused when she said, "Good morning GAB. We know you hoped for this to be a quick visit to drop off and pick up anything for the end of the school year, but that visit may have to be prolonged for a bit. We're going into a lockdown. Please follow all lockdown procedures." and with that, she was off the PA system.

My class, who all happened to be there at the same time, all looked at each other, confused, and a bit scared – was this their idea for an end-of-year prank? The answer to that was pretty obvious: no, they wouldn't do something like this. It would get everyone too scared and worried. They wouldn't have a lockdown when school wasn't even running, since this was just a time for us to drop off and pick up our stuff. So there could only be one possible explanation. We were in a real lockdown. This was an actual danger.

Our teacher, with the help of some students, closed all doors, both the ones that led to the school and outside, as well as the windows, and without a word, we all filed into the side room. Even with the deathly silence, we could all feel the tension in the air – it was thick enough that someone could probably cut it with a knife. The silence felt even weirder given the fact that this class couldn't go two seconds without someone being loud, yet no one tried to crack a joke. Or accidentally knock something over. Or even dare move. We were all too scared. We all hoped that this was a small mistake, and there really was no danger. But we wouldn't know for a while. We also all knew that if someone dangerous was outside, we'd be the first targets – our outside door was the only one that didn't need to be opened by the office. It was the only one without a security camera that could offer evidence of a break-in to the police. And so we hid.

But like I said before, our class isn't exactly quiet. After what felt like an hour, but was probably only a few minutes, we heard a bang. Everyone looked at a student, or rather, at a cabinet, where a student, who had crawled into the cabinet to hide, was now sitting, with the cabinet door open. He had banged his head or something, and was now rubbing it.

We all looked at him with a warning expression that said, “*be quiet or we might be in real danger!*” and continued to look at him cautiously, mildly scared that he might make another sound and give away our location to any intruders. But then he did the unthinkable. He made a scene.

He was silent though, so it was rather confusing at first, and we all thought he was trying to be funny for some reason, which none of us appreciated. We all glared at him, warning him to stop. In any other case, someone would start laughing, but not now. Not in a situation so serious like this. But after a few moments of this, someone realized that he was trying to communicate something silently.

Our teacher went over to investigate. The kid crawled out, pointing at something in the cabinet the entire time. When he saw what it was, our teacher looked extremely confused. But he closed the door and went back to his spot, shaking his head at the student the entire time, as if trying to tell him, “no.” He listened, but another student didn’t, and he went right up there and reopened the cabinet door, then crawled in...and immediately fell somehow. We were all confused, given the fact that the space was barely tall enough for him to crawl in, much less trip in.

It didn’t take long for all of us to rush over to the cabinet, and one by one, we fell – or rather, climbed down – to the same fate as our classmate: there was a hole in the floor of the cabinet, and it seemingly led to a secret passageway of some sort. And not a moment too soon did we find it, for when around half of us had gone through, we heard our principal on the PA systems again, this time saying, “Alright GAB, the problem has been solved. You may resume your normal activities now,” immediately followed by a door opening in the hallway, then a loud sound that sounded like a gunshot. Right after, someone else came onto the PA system, a voice none of us recognized, this time saying, “Alright GAB, time to come out now. Don’t bother hiding. We **will** find you. Either come to the office within five minutes, or we’ll drag you here by force.” Then the sound cut as the microphone was turned off, and the half of us who were still in the side room practically flew into the secret passageway in fear.

Our teacher was the last one, and he made it, closing the cabinet door behind him, just in time – he heard the side room door rattle just as he was climbing down into the passageway. We all looked at each other, still too scared to even breathe, for fear of being found. Finally our teacher broke the silence, saying, “Alright, Soggy Pancakes, I know this seems pretty scary, and it is pretty scary, but we’re going to be okay. Now, I know you want to explore, but let’s not split up, since this is a new place and we don’t want to lose the group.”

We started walking along the tunnel, which was completely underground, and I wondered why no one had ever found it before. It was clearly well-made, so *someone* knew about it, and spent at least some time making it – Even though the “walls” were just dirt, none of it fell on us, which meant that this was obviously well thought out.

But why under a school? And how come we had never even heard of it before? Surely if there was something like this at the school, it would be the only thing that anyone would talk about. But it wasn't. Which meant that this was probably a secret thing. Or maybe it was still being worked on, and they had only started it after we had started remote learning again back in April. But that still left the question of why they would build this, and not let the community know about it. Unless they *wanted* this project to remain secret. But is that even legal? And why would they want to keep this confidential, if it was so easy for anyone to find? Besides, it's a small community, so *someone* must have known about it. That just brings me back to the beginning again though...Why would they not have told people about this? Maybe it's a top secret thing from the government. Nah. This is a random school in a random neighbourhood. They wouldn't do that. But that would be cool if we were part of some epic adventure. But why us, of all the other people and all the other schools in the world?

I thought about the dilemma I had created for myself, and continued walking with the group. We didn't know where we were going, but there were a lot of forks and turns in the path, so at the first fork in the path, our teacher had taken out his phone to record the path and the turns we took...immediately to be disappointed because his phone wouldn't turn on, presumably because the battery was dead. So one of my classmates took out her phone...only to find that it wasn't working either. Everyone tried on their own devices. Nothing worked. We were pretty creeped out by this, since even if we didn't have an internet connection underground, we should still be able to turn on our phones, and use anything that didn't need internet. There was also no way that *all* of our devices were somehow dead at the same time. So the only conclusion was that this was weird.

Because we were unsettled by this new discovery, we voted on whether we should keep walking ahead or turn back, and we came to the almost-unanimous decision that we should keep going, and just record the turns and paths we took with pencil and paper. Normally, this would have been a problem, but because some of us had a lot of stuff to pick up or drop off, we were advised to bring our backpacks. And this might be the only time when all of us would be appreciative of the messy students for forgetting stuff, since they were the ones who had pencils and paper that they forgot, and were going to take home today. So the problem of recording our moves was solved as soon as it arose.

A few people were assigned to record our moves, but almost everyone, even the people who weren't assigned to the job, recorded where we went anyway, just in case someone accidentally wrote something down that wasn't accurate.

Having found a way to make sure we could get back to where we came from, we walked forward. We came across many forks in the road, and took many turns, but other than a few small arguments over which way we should go, which all got resolved rather quickly, the trip went fairly smoothly. Until...we came to an opening with a discovery that confused us even more than we already were, and just added another layer to the mystery of this underground path.

The secret opening had seven paths leading away from it, other than the one we came from. That would be a problem when picking which way to go. However, this became the least of our worries almost immediately, as we saw five odd vehicles in the middle of the opening. Someone marked the path we had come from, and then we looked towards the vehicles. We inspected them for a bit, some of us with our eyes because “We shouldn’t touch things that aren’t ours. What if we get in trouble?” and some of us actually trying to power up the vehicles, earning scolding from others because, “What if we can’t control them? Or they short circuit?” Despite this, some students managed to start up the vehicles. “For science,” they said.

Only after powering everything up and getting it all working, and making almost no loud noises since the vehicles were oddly silent, did we realize something: these vehicles looked weird because they were meant for flying. Someone immediately said, “That’s sick! Can we fly them?” and immediately received a response of “NO!” from a quarter of the group. The other three quarters of the group, however, either stayed quiet or said something along the lines of, “Yeah, can we fly them?” Our teacher responded logically with, “You don’t even know how to drive!” but they disregarded that. Instead, they countered by saying that flying was different from driving.

And so, with a bit more convincing, we found ourselves split up into five groups, even though the ships could hold all of us in one ship with plenty of space to spare, because, “What if we need the extra ships for something?” and, “We should all get some driving practice in.” And with that, we voted on a path, took it, and headed towards a strange, unknown place.

We drove through the tunnel for a long time, never splitting up, going faster than the others, or taking a different route than the others no matter how many times we came to a part of the tunnel with multiple routes we could take because, “What if we get lost and never find each other again?” We spoke through weird walkie-talkies that were in the vehicles, and strangely, they worked. So the vehicles must have been *somewhat* recently used.

The vehicles were extremely easy to figure out and drive, and within five minutes, everyone had figured out how the automobiles worked from top to bottom.

Because we were all “experts,” every once in a while, and by that I mean every two seconds, one of the drivers tried to perform a trick that left half of the class yelling at them to “STOP!!!” because “WHAT IF WE ALL DIE BECAUSE OF YOU?” They didn’t listen though, and that left only two out of the five vehicles being safe at any given time.

Because some of my classmates were scared to lose their lives due to their pilots, they didn’t move from their seats. The vehicle I was on, however, had a pilot who wasn’t trying any tricks due to the fear of losing control of the automobile, so our ride was much smoother. Because of this, everyone besides the designated pilot on my ship decided to start exploring.

And we immediately regretted not doing that before starting to drive. Because in the rooms other than the main one we were in, there were living quarters. People lived here.

We didn't want to invade their privacy any more than we already were by being on the ship in the first place, so we avoided digging around too much. But some of the most notable things we found were a strange-looking diary, which we obviously didn't read because that would be an invasion of privacy, as well as a box of jewelry, some books, and some weird things that we didn't know the purpose for. Everything looked as odd as the diary – and the vehicles, too – but they were interesting. We had never seen anything like them, with their intricate designs that were unfamiliar to us, and the way they were made – they looked unique.

Another thing we noted was that there were no pictures whatsoever. Nothing of family, of friends, of people whose ship these might be that we just stole – or rather, “borrowed,” as some of my classmates liked to call it.

Eventually, we went back to the “main” room, where the pilots were, and we told everyone about our findings. The other ship with the pilot who was trying to stay safe also recorded similar findings, and after the other three pilots calmed down a bit and started driving normally, the “crew” on those ships reported similar things as well. We all felt bad, and some of us wanted to head back, but the majority of us, for some reason, wanted to continue exploring on the stolen ships. And so the three pilots resumed their “Who can get us killed first” – I mean, their, “Who can do the coolest tricks” – competition, leaving the others yelling at them again.

Finally, after lots of thoughts on how we were going to explain to the parents how it was completely their kids' fault that they had died, we found a glowing door-like thing. It looked like an entrance to a strange, albeit cool, place. And so, with a bit of persuasion, we convinced our teacher to let us drive through this glowing thing. And the first thing we heard were screams of, “NO! GET OFF THOSE VEHICLES! YOU'RE GOING TO KILL US ALL!”

We listened to the strangers yelling at us, and we “parked” right beside the glowing “door.” We all got out, and saw a woman standing there, looking tremendously angry. “You could have had us killed! Now, please turn off those vehicles completely so they cannot be used to harm us easily.” We were so scared by her tone that the five of us who were driving did as she said, while the rest of us stood in our places, without daring to breathe too loud, much less talk.

Once the “pilots” were done, the woman started walking. Normally, we, or at least most of us, would have the common sense to not listen to everything strangers say, or trust them whatsoever, but this woman was strangely...familiar. So we took her walking to mean that we were to follow her.

The “journey” to our destination was short, and before we knew it, we were there. We exited the room we were in, walked through a small area that we didn't know the reason for,

went up a small staircase, took a right turn, and passed numerous rooms. All the rooms seemed to hold technology as advanced as the ships we had come here on, and the likes of which we had never seen before. Was this a secret military base we had somehow walked into?

The woman held a neutral expression the entire time we were walking, which seemed to suggest that she had seen everything in this place numerous times, and they had lost their lustre. My class and I, on the other hand, were amazed at everything we saw. Every time we passed by something we found incredible – which is to say, every single thing we saw – we stopped in our tracks to admire it, only to rush ahead to be able to keep in pace with the woman, who never stopped when we did.

On our short walk, we saw some sort of headquarters, where people must have been contacting others to complete something, maybe a mission? We saw rooms filled with meetings – presumably – where someone was likely presenting their findings. We saw rooms with people writing, presumably reports on whatever new findings they had discovered. We saw tech we could hardly imagine everywhere: in the rooms, in the halls, on the ceiling, on the doors – no place went without the tech.

We were so amazed by everything that we started talking amongst ourselves about what this place could be, despite the intimidating aura that the woman radiated. Or rather, we whispered amongst ourselves, as we were still kind of scared that the woman would yell at us again. But at least *some* of the fear had been overcome by the excitement of being in a place like this.

Finally, we saw our destination: a room at the end of a hallway. And as soon as I saw it, my heart almost stopped. Everything finally clicked into place, and I realized that it had for my entire class too. I wondered why we hadn't seen it sooner. Maybe we were too busy trying to take in and process every detail of the place for the general idea to click. Maybe we realized it in the back of our minds, but we were in denial. Or maybe, we never thought something like this was possible.

The woman opened the room's door, but unlike on our walk here, she was more patient, as if she understood the shock we were going through, and she waited for all of us to enter the room before calmly closing it behind us. We all looked at each other, each seemingly asking the others to confirm if this was really happening, but none of us uttered a single word. Even our teacher, who would normally say something in situations like this, remained at a loss for words, both because of our new realization, and because he must have nearly had a heart attack because we were quiet without having been yelled at.

It was when we had all walked in, gone down the five steps of a mini-staircase to pass a mini-room and enter the actual room, and found places to stand at the bottom of the stairs, did the woman begin talking. "We," and with that she gestured towards a man standing beside us

that my class had never noticed until then, "know that you must have many questions. So let us explain." And with that, she pressed a button on a desk, and a hologram appeared. We were all rather shocked, but given all the tech we had seen in the hall, should we really be so surprised? We crowded closer to the desk to be able to hear the woman and see the holograms better. "Since the beginning of time, there have been alternate dimensions," she began. "Whenever somebody or something had more than one option or choice, different dimensions opened up, one for each different path that could be taken." And she showed a diagram of this on the hologram thing. So the alternate dimension theory we had was true. "As you can probably tell, every small decision having a different path would add up and become something extraordinary. Such is the case today. Our world is yours, but it only looks vastly different because of the decision changes along the way, the most notable one being the Takeover. The people who caused the lockdown at your school today are from the same group that led the Takeover. In your world, this group did not exist because the leader of the Takeover decided not to go on with his plan. In our world, however... he did."

"But what is the Takeover?" one of my classmates asked, and I was certain I saw our teacher nodding, as if to say, "Excellent question!"

The woman's face turned even more grim than it had been previously – and it was really grim previously. She gave a sad sigh, seemingly lost in a bad thought, but proceeded to explain. "You see, this group wanted to turn everyone into mechanical beings instead of keeping them as living humans. We don't know the reason for this, but due to the general nature of this group, we believe it is to create an army so powerful that it cannot be defeated. And they realized the best way to do this was to keep them human enough to be able to strategize, but turn them robotic enough that they couldn't feel emotions, or even pain really. They thought to take out everything they thought would hinder full power." She had shown us multiple pictures, or rather, holograms, pertaining to her story, but despite the goriness of some of them, what really stood out to me was the image of a human after they were turned mechanical. It was like a blueprint, and it showed that most of the brain had been altered, namely the parts responsible for feeling emotions and pain, as someone in my class pointed out. They were literally numb in every sense. They had been altered so they could feel, but couldn't feel pain. They had also been altered so that they didn't get hurt nearly as easily as their human selves.

"But wait, if they wanted everyone to be part of the army, what's the point? There will be no one to fight anymore since they'll all be on the same side." Asked someone else from my class. I once again saw my teacher making mental notes on who to give points to.

The man, who had been silently listening up until now, took over for that question. "This group is one that loves to see violence. We believe that they would do anything to see a fight, or bloodshed. They're essentially addicted to violence, the same way many others become addicted to alcohol or drugs. They murder anyone they want to, and who they don't deem to be 'special' or unique, especially if that person is standing between them and their goal of violence. We strongly believe that they want to watch as their cyborg army destroys countless souls in

their quest for violence, and then they want everyone to take “sides” and fight until there’s only one person left, who they would kill themselves.

“When they realized there was no one left to turn except for our organization, and that while they couldn’t catch us, they also couldn’t cause as much harm, causing a fault in their plan, they found ways to travel through dimensions in their hunger for blood and murder. When they did this, however, they opened portals to get to the other worlds, but what they didn’t know was that “bridges” to connect this dimension and the dimension they entered had also appeared in random locations, without any sort of pattern to them. This was how you came here, and why you had never seen this place before. However, while the portal you came through was not the one they used, they used the same tunnel to get to your world, which is why you found the vehicles in the tunnel. Now—”

“Wait, those are their ships? No wonder you panicked!” Someone in my class said. They got a reply of, “No. That was because anyone with common sense can realize that flying a ship indoors is going to result in said ship crashing into something and causing casualties which we cannot have. Now—”

“Wait, how did you know it was us and not ‘people’ from the army? How do you know that *we’re* not from the army?” asked someone else in my class.

The woman said, “I will answer that question now, but please save the rest of your questions for the end.” She must have been rather annoyed by the interruptions, because the intimidating hint in her voice was back, giving us all the message that we should listen quietly, otherwise she might get angry. And she did *not* seem like the type of person one wants to anger. “Now, the reason we knew it was you who entered this dimension is because – and I say this with no offense intended – your less than impressive flying skills. It’s not your fault though, you’ve never had formal *driving* training, except for you,” she gestured towards our teacher, “much less *flying* training.

“We know you’re still fully human because the Takeover in your dimension has only just started, so the chances that you’ve *already* been turned mechanical are extremely slim. Also, cyborgs have knowledge implanted into their brains. They are ‘taught’ how to drive perfectly. The same method of implantment is used to put commands from the leader in their minds, so they can carry them out with perfect coordination. Either you were somehow taught to fly in a manner that only people who have never flown before would fly in, *and* you were told to listen to everything we say and not kill us immediately – which does *not* sound like the leader at all, they want violence as soon as possible – or you’re just people from another dimension who are either a third party, or you’re innocents who just found yourselves in this mess.”

We understood a bit more about the topic now, but there was still one thing we couldn’t understand. “But how do you know that we’re from another dimension and not this one?” asked another one of my classmates, and for a third time, I could tell that points were going to be awarded.

The man answered that question. “Oh, that. We know that because ever since the people involved in the Takeover started to jump through dimensions, we have followed, to try to stop them. We know that there will *always* be a dimension where they still take over, but if we can have one where they *don’t*, we can stop at least *some* of the violence. It gives us peace of mind to know that we were part of the outcome that led to peace. Eventually, we realized there was a pattern to their movements, and so we decided to stay ahead of them. We sent some members of our organization into each of the next dimensions that we predicted would be invaded next, and we had them place cameras to track your every movement. There are multiple at your school.”

At this, the woman pulled up a hologram of GAB, and then one of our classroom. We were all shocked by this...and a bit creeped out, too. Were they really watching us at every moment? The woman continued, saying, “we knew that the tunnel was in the cabinet in that room, and that you had gone there to hide, so when the agent from the Takeover went into the room and came back empty-handed, we knew that there was only one place where you could have gone: the tunnel. We confirmed this by viewing footage from our cameras inside the tunnels, which showed you flying recklessly through them,” She looked at us, clearly unimpressed, as she said this, then she continued. “This is why we didn’t have that much of a reaction to you flying right into the base: we already knew you were coming, and that the only real danger you posed were the ships which, frankly, you cannot fly.”

Some of the “pilots” from the class looked kind of offended at this, but the woman ignored their faces. They all went back to normal, however, when another one of my classmates asked, “Wait. Why here, why now, and why you?” I saw my teacher take a notepad out of his pocket to write down names for points, and my classmates who saw him started laughing. Even the two people who had been explaining everything to us smiled. But the answer they gave explained the most out of anything they had said, and it confirmed what we had guessed for so long.

The woman’s reply was the final piece of the puzzle. She said, “You see, while history has been altered just enough through the dimensions that we are not the same people as we would be in your world, we happen to be in the same dimension “group” as you in some terms. Because of this, while the purposes and the indoor “decorations” of this building are different, it still has the same structure, and is the same general building, as your school. That’s why it seems like your school – because it *is*. The same thing goes for the people. We’re altered from you in terms of some of our jobs and abilities, but the general aspects of us are the same. This is why we’re so familiar – because we’re people you know. We’re your principal and vice-principal from your school.”

The revelation felt a bit like a dream, even though we all knew it was true. This was the world we were in, and it might have been our own world had we been born in it and not our own

dimension. But wait. If this world was close enough to ours that all the general ideas were the same, wouldn't that mean that we existed somewhere in this world? I thought about the idea for a bit, scared to ask anything, but finally I asked. "If you're the version of our principal and vice-principal of this world, do we also exist in this world?"

The principal's answer to that question left us all a bit shocked and creeped out, but excited nonetheless. This was because she told us that we had counterparts in this world who had the general base, appearances, and personalities as us, but were different from us because what we experience shapes us, and the experiences they had were vastly different from ours. And then we became even more ecstatic and nervous when the principal said, "Well, now let's go meet them!"

We were led to another room, and I don't think any of us remembered the trip very well because even though we went into a new stairwell and passed a new hall before making it to the room, we were too lost in our own thoughts and conversations on meeting ourselves to really register any of it. Until we actually saw the room we were brought to. It was to the left of the stairwell, separated from it by what we assumed were storage compartments. However, they looked like lockers to us, mainly because that's what they would have been in our dimension. And we knew exactly whose lockers each of them were, because these would have been our lockers and our classroom had we been in a non-COVID world.

Speaking of which, did this world have COVID too? It didn't seem like it, given the fact that none of them were wearing masks, didn't socially distance, or follow any of the other public health measures that were enforced in our world. Even if they were all a "bubble," they should still have made sure to follow the precautions around us, since they didn't know if we had it, and we had never interacted with them before, so we weren't in their bubble. Either they had found a cure for the virus, and everyone was vaccinated against it, or they didn't know about it at all. It was probably the former, as they couldn't have spied on – I mean, guarded – us for so long without knowing about the virus that overturned all of our routines. But how had they found a cure? And how long did it take for their society to go back to normal? I pushed the questions to the back of my mind, but stored them to ask later, and turned my attention back to the revelation in front of us.

We paused for a moment to take in the fact that our classroom was still being used by "us", but recovered quickly because it was expected at this point – we had learned by this point that there would be *many* similarities between this world and ours. The principals opened the door, and some of us hesitated, before our teacher went in, and we followed.

We found tech scattered everywhere, things I assumed were this world's equivalent of tablets, along with paper, pens, and things I assumed were tech from this world. 20 students were in the room, some on laptops, tablets, and phones, seemingly doing research or working on projects, while others were engineering things, as it seemed. A man who I assumed to be

their teacher or supervisor was sitting at a desk at the front of the classroom, which was in front of the door. They were all engaged in whatever work they were doing, but when we entered the classroom, they stopped whatever they were doing, went silent, and looked at us. It was a bit awkward for all the students involved, and I'm pretty sure that at that moment, my entire class knew what being the new student felt like.

The adults in the room were either oblivious to the awkwardness that the students felt, or they chose to ignore it. The principal went right up and said, "8G, these are the students we talked about. You will be sharing your space with them for the next little while, so please follow the three R's, and treat them with compassion, just like you would any other person. Their schedules, rules, and skills are a bit different from ours, so please teach them what they need to know."

The vice principal then spoke, saying, "We know you must have many questions, but please try not to overwhelm them. They have already been given so much information in such a short timespan. Please don't make it any harder for them than it is already. Now, we're going to step outside for a moment to talk to your teachers. Students, please get along, and don't fight, or blow up the building. We only have a limited number of resources, and while we know you love to experiment, we can't keep replacing things that get ruined in your experiments." And with that, the principals, the teacher from this world, and my class's teacher stepped out into the hall and closed the door behind them to talk, leaving us with twenty people who were perfect strangers to us, yet we knew perfectly well.

There was another awkward moment where no one did anything, before someone from this dimension's class chose to say, "Alright guys, hi. We're basically you, but we're not. This is as weird for us as it is for you. So I guess you can just spread out for now, and ask if you don't know what something is." And so we spread out, with my class walking around the class, some quickly engaged in whatever they found, while others simply hovered around for a while.

However, it was quickly becoming rather confusing, since our versions from this dimension looked, spoke, and had the same name as us. Other than our clothing, there were no differences that were plain to see and could be spotted easily. Speaking of which, their clothing gave off the aura of a typical "far in the future" genre of book/movie, and it was rather interesting how the differences in our dimensions were so small that we looked, acted, and had the same names as our alternate versions, yet our knowledge, and our available devices and tools were so different.

Anyways, it was becoming confusing when someone yelled someone else's name and wanted the person from their dimension to respond, but that person from both dimensions responded, so it was rather perplexing to figure out who was being spoken to. Our solution? Do nothing about it. It was probably better that way anyways, as one of the students said, since we were the "same" person anyways.

Once we had the names worked out, we came to the part that we all found the creepiest and weirdest part of all this: we would have to work with people who were us, but weren't us. It would be like talking to a mirror, and the mirror says something other than what you just told it. This would take getting used to. So because this was so weird, we decided that instead of doing the usual "introductions," the people from this dimension would continue with their work, and the people from my dimension would walk around and get to know everyone and everything. Same as before. However, there was one added "rule:" You weren't allowed to sit in a corner and not socialize with anyone from the other dimension. This went smoother than an introduction thing would, and it was also a lot more efficient. Besides, we were almost certain that the teachers would make us do an introduction thing when they came back anyways, so it was probably better to just wait for them.

So the class from this dimension continued working, and we started walking around again. It was extremely weird to suddenly have a "twin," and it felt like we were being reunited with a long-lost sibling, in a way. It was also confusing. Nonetheless, we continued to talk to the people from this dimension, the only apparent things distinguishing us being the names we were using and the clothing we wore. I started talking to some people, and after a bit of random conversation, we started talking about the history of this world.

From this conversation, I found out a lot more about this dimension than I had ever hoped to find out so quickly. It was a gold mine of information. At first, we just talked about our own worlds and experiences. I told them about the fact that our technology wasn't as advanced as theirs. They told me that the technology here was nothing compared to the devices that the people leading the Takeover had. I wondered just how much more advanced than us the people from this dimension were. I told them about COVID, and the precautions people in my dimension needed to take to keep everyone safe, and asked them if they had ever had anything like it. They said they had, but it wasn't a very big deal, and only really affected them for a month or two before fading into the background. I started thinking that they were omnipotent compared to the people from my dimension, and that we were primitive compared to them. I told them about the global problems in my world, such as climate change and poverty. They said they suffered from the same thing. I was rather taken aback. And I realized that despite being more technologically and medically advanced than us, they weren't that far ahead of us in the grand scheme of things at all.

I asked them to elaborate on what they meant, and they said that global warming was a huge problem in this dimension, and that many species had died from it. They said that it was getting to the point where their scientists said that if the temperatures got any higher, and the pollution levels increased any more, every single person might have to get artificially modified to be able to survive the disastrous changes their world is going through. However, they also said, in a very angry tone, that it's tremendously likely that this is just a ploy to get everyone under the control of the leader, and that the leader refuses to fix the issue of global warming just so he has a valid reason to expect artificial modifications placed on everyone so he can implant his machines in their brains and control them. I was rather horrified by this – I couldn't imagine living in a world as cruel as this. It seemed like being more advanced in terms of research

wasn't always better, as they still had the same, maybe even worse, problems as the people in my world as a society.

I expressed my concern and grief for them, and asked the two people what they were working on, trying to change the subject to something lighter. They still looked as serious as ever, before silently looking at one another, seemingly debating whether or not to tell me. Finally, they made a decision, and it seemed like it was a "yes," as they started telling me about the entire story of this world.

"Long before we were even born, in a time we can barely fathom, there was peace in this world. People were happy, everything was in order, and while small fights still broke out, nothing too serious really happened. Well, they were serious, but nothing compared to what's happening now. But eventually, one person rose in power, much higher than anyone else, praised by so many people all over the world, who thought him to be the greatest leader to ever live. And so, he started becoming more and more important as a leader. He moved from leading his own small following to his town. From there, he became the leader of his state. From there, he moved on to his country. But nothing was ever enough for him." Did we mention that people from all over the world looked up to him? Well, they did, and they went to the extremes with it. They blindly supported everything he said. They followed his each and every command. They practically worshipped the ground he stood on. Eventually, it got to the point where people were overthrowing the person at the head of their own governments so the leader could lead the country –"

"Which was a pretty dumb decision, by the way, and I don't know why anyone would ever do that." Interjected the second student.

The first student nodded in agreement, then continued the story, "Maybe he was better then. But as his popularity grew, so did his ego. He started to believe that he was the most important person on the planet. He started to believe that no one was as great as him. He started to believe that he should have power over everyone in the world, and all should bow down to his commands."

"Again, just why would he think he was a god in this world?" Said the second student, then let the first continue again.

"He let the thoughts consume him. He yearned for power, so with the mental support of having so many followers, he started a global takeover. However, what he didn't anticipate was that there were people who didn't want to follow him. There were people who wanted to have their own leaders, or live by their own rules. He didn't realize that the whole world wasn't in agreement about him.

"I mean, he should have expected that. Has he never been in a disagreement with *anyone? Ever?*" Said someone from my dimension, who had decided to join the conversation.

The first girl spoke. "Clearly not. The leader couldn't understand why the people didn't want him to be their ruler. After so many years of being worshipped, he forgot what it was like to be anything other than the person in power. So he tried to make the people follow him. But no matter what he tried, they wouldn't budge on their decision. They had also managed to turn a few of the leader's supporters against him. And so, he came up with what he deemed the "perfect" plan: get rid of anyone who went against him. He had never seen violence before, so we're not sure where exactly he got that idea, but he did."

The other person added to the story at this point, saying, "We should probably tell you that before this, the leader had never been any sort of violent. Ever."

Then the first person went back to telling the story. "Yeah, before then, the leader was usually calm. There was a theory that he had a fear of blood before then, or that the people in his life had kept him away from any violence in his life. So when he decided to get rid of everyone that didn't support him leading the world, more and more people started to see who he really was. They started to turn. And this made the leader so upset that instead of waiting and planning everything out properly like he usually did, he did something compulsively: He killed one of the people who didn't support him. We think that seeing the person die, losing a lot of blood, did something to the leader. We think that at that moment, something broke in him. Maybe it was trauma at realizing what he had done. Maybe it was seeing something violent, and being a part of it, after a lifetime of calm. Maybe it was realizing that his action had actually stopped someone from speaking out against him. We don't know exactly what it was, but from that moment forward, he became kind of eccentric. He craved violence more than anything else. He would do anything to get it.

"But soon enough, he realized that normal people die too easily. He saw that it wasn't enough to watch a quick death. So he made the best engineers and doctors in the world come up with something to make them stronger. Make them more resilient. Make them harder to kill. Make them heal faster so they could go back to fighting sooner.

"While he was planning all this, he realized that this would be a problem. They could still think. They could still make their own decisions. And therefore, they could still turn against them. So he, being the skilled person that he was, decided to make a machine that could control someone by being implanted in their brain. It controlled the neurons in the brain, and was connected to a similar machine in the leader's brain. With radio signals sent from his brain to the other person's, the leader could send his thoughts to the connected person – he could tell them what to think. But unlike the person's machine, which was always on at all times, the leader could turn his machine on or off, and in this way, he could control what orders were sent. He could control what the people thought."

I shuddered just thinking about this. I couldn't even begin to imagine what it felt like having to live in a world where these types of people and machines exist. Sure, there were terrifying levels of machinery in my dimension, but nothing like this. Maybe being more advanced wasn't always better.

The girl who was talking continued with her story. “After this invention, the leader became obsessed. He realized just how much he could do with it. He realized the violence and destruction he could cause. Maybe he started thinking everyone would do what he said now that he had created something like this. Maybe he started feeling like he was more than human with this new technology. Maybe he started feeling like his followers, and everyone on this planet, really, were his puppets, that it didn’t matter what happened to them. So he made them fight. Made them destroy each other. Made them act like they were in a war, when they weren’t. Made them suffer from violence, when they wanted peace. He started to spend every moment of his existence creating chaos, creating a world where nothing can live in harmony.”

He wasn’t sane at that point. We don’t know what he was, but he certainly wasn’t sane.” Said the second student.

The first student nodded in agreement, then continued, saying, “After months of this, he managed to turn everyone into the mechanical beings he wanted them to be – or at least, he turned everyone he could capture into the mechanical beings. You see, there are still a few people, mostly either the people who had rebelled against him in the beginning, or people they were affiliated with, such as their friends and family. These people learned quickly enough that they needed to hide, that they needed to stay away from the leader’s grasp. But they also knew that they couldn’t do this forever. So they decided they needed to fight. But to do that, they needed to train. They needed to make weapons and machinery, the likes of which had never existed before. But they couldn’t wait. Every moment was precious. This had to be done as soon as possible.

“They taught everyone with the appropriate general abilities how to fight – the old, the heavily disabled, and young children were the only ones who didn’t get to physically be in the war. But besides a few special exceptions, even they had a role in all this. Children who were old enough to walk, talk, and function were given light tasks. The elderly, and disabled, who didn’t have the physical ability to fight, but whose minds were still sharp, programmed things, or planned them. Anyone over the age to be in school either learned to fight, or do something else related to the fight, such as strategizing the best ways to bring down the leader. And then there’s us. The people in this building.

“We’re students, just like we’ve been told you are. We have our academic subjects – Math, English, French, Science, History and Geography, Art, Music, and Health, just like you.” I noted the fact that there was no Gym in that list, but let her continue instead of interrupting her to ask. Some of my classmates, who were also listening to the story, either didn’t notice, or didn’t interrupt either.

“But there’s a few differences. First of all, this is a school, but it’s also a base for the people fighting against the leader. You see all this technology? This is all for the war. Our principals and teachers are our guardians during the school day, but they also plan for the war. They work with generals in charge of parts of this organization. They meet with them often,

figuring out the details. And when the war starts, they'll fight in it. All of them. And you guys just came at the perfect time, because you're the most impor--"

The girl who was talking was cut off by someone else standing on top of a desk, but I didn't miss the glare her friend gave her. Did she reveal something she shouldn't have? I barely had any time to think about this, however, as the student who had climbed onto the desk yelled, "EVERYONE, TAKE YOUR MASKS OFF!!! WE HAVE MEDICINE IN CASE YOU DO GET SICK, THERE'S NO NEED FOR ALL THESE PROTOCOLS!!!" Then he jumped down from the desk and continued doing whatever he was doing.

I wasn't that surprised by the fact that they had already found a cure – they had said that the pandemic had only lasted for a few months, so they had probably found a cure quickly, otherwise they would still be following COVID protocols. I was taken aback for a moment, however, by the fact that someone had just stood on a desk and yelled, but I realized who exactly I was talking about, and immediately it felt more normal.

The people who had been telling me the story of this world weren't startled, so I assumed that this was a common occurrence. "That was...kind of expected. Anyways, let's get back to the story of this world." I said.

The people I was talking to resumed their story. "Where were we?" asked the first girl I was talking to.

"I think we were at the part about what we do at school apart from the subjects that they have in their dimension." Answered the second, rather quickly. There was definitely something they weren't telling us. I ignored the questions I had for now, storing them away for later, and listened to their story.

"So anyways, our classes. We have our "regular" classes, which are the same as yours. But we also have three subjects that you don't. Actually, it's more like two and a half, but still. These three subjects are Engineering, Battle Strategy, and Battle Training. Engineering is basically what the name says – we just engineer stuff. But we also program stuff, so I guess it's not *completely* what the name says. Anyways, that's the class we're in right now. Normally, we make prototypes, and if the principal, or the people in charge of engineering and machinery in our organization, approve of it, either we get more materials, and we get to make more copies of it, which is unlikely, or they send the code and the designs to their engineers to make more of the machine. It's basically a job, since the school gets more funding, as well as more materials, from this."

We all might have looked slightly shocked at the notion of all of them working at such a young age, since the second student said, "We know, working at such a young age isn't 'normal' in your dimension, but we're not in normal times here. That's why we pretty much have 'jobs' so young. People in the older generations didn't have to do this too, and it hasn't always been like this. This is just an emergency, and we want to be helpful to the organization, so we do it."

The first student nodded, then a third student from this world, who had joined the conversation, said, "Battle Strategy is also a pretty straightforward explanation. We basically learn strategies that can be used when fighting in a battle. We also learn to fly and drive things, both manually and remotely. It's pretty fun."

A fourth student added to that, saying, "It's fun, but if you like Battle Strategy, then you'll like Battle Training even more. It's basically what you would call 'Gym' in your world. And it just happens to be our next class. Which is just about to start."

At this point, basically everyone from my dimension, and consequently, everyone from this dimension, was listening to the story of this world, and the explanation of the new subjects. So it was no surprise that the students from my world had questions.

"Wait, so this is basically Gym?" asked one of my classmates.

"So are you basically being trained to become child soldiers?" Asked another one.

"Do you guys use any weapons? Are we in danger of getting hurt?" Asked a third student.

However, none of them got their answers, because at that moment, the bell rang, and like clockwork, the door opened, and the principal, the vice principal, and both teachers walked in. The teacher from this dimension said, "Alright, class, we're going to go to Battle Training now. Show the students from the other dimension how to get there, please."

The students from this dimension started walking out into the hall, and the students from my dimension followed them. We went to our right, went down the stairs we had previously came from, walked forward, passed a few doors, and went out one of the doors that was an exit. Basically, it was the path we needed to take to get back to the tunnel my class had come from, but we never went down the small staircase.

After we had exited the building, we went down some stairs, walked along the wall of the building, turned to the right a bit to avoid walking into another building, and walked in between two "walls." We gathered there, and the teacher from this dimension started talking. "Alright, today we're going to do something a bit different from what we normally do. We have a lot of people, and half of us have never been in a Battle Training class before, so half of you already know the rules, but for the half that don't, here they are: You're all going to get a practice gun, with red paint in each 'bullet.' If you get shot, you're out. Last person standing wins.

"However, because there's so many of you, I'm adding a twist: you're going to put yourselves into pairs, with each pair being each person from both dimensions. These will be your teams. Last team standing wins. However, if even one of you gets shot, you're both out.

Make your groups and get your guns from their spots.” And with that, the people from this dimension grabbed their “counterparts” from my world, and we all ran back to the building.

The room we were supposed to get our guns from was close to our area outside, as it was right beside the building, so it only took a few seconds to run there. The people from this dimension obviously knew what room the guns were in, but when the people from my dimension walked in, we knew which room it was too. This had been the room where our adventure in this world had first started. This was where we had first met the principals, where we had first “met” this dimension itself. It also happened to be the Gym from my dimension.

It took only a moment for everyone from my dimension to recover from the ‘shock’ of this new revelation, as we were accustomed to the similarities at this point. After all, we were walking, talking, and interacting with people who were basically clones of us. However, something that I wondered was how we had all missed the blatant similarities between this room and the gym from our world when we had all walked – or rather, flew – in here. It was probably all the technology and the different equipment, paired with the fact that we had gotten yelled at the moment we had entered this room, that distracted us from this detail that now seemed to be glaring at us.

We made our way to the front of the room, and opened the storage doors. There were shelves of weaponry, but someone from this dimension said that everything was harmless, and that they couldn’t be loaded with real bullets, so we were safe. While we were getting the guns, “bullets”, “coats,” and goggles – which we had been forced to wear to protect our eyes and our clothing– my version from this world – with whom it was still weird to talk to – said that the reason we were outside was because machinery had been set up around the building and the grounds, so we couldn’t be detected. But I was still kind of apprehensive about having classes where anyone, especially people who could capture us and turn us into cyborgs, could spot us. But clearly, these people felt safe, and they had likely been here for years, so I chose to trust technology too.

We went back outside, where both teachers were still waiting. Once we were all back in our spots, the teacher from this dimension said, “The borders of the area you can play in are the schools, the fence, and the farthest edge of the field, including the spaces around the field’s right and top fences. Naturally, you can go into any of the playgrounds, as that’s close enough to the school. Don’t go out of those areas, though, or you’re out.”

I took note of the borders. We had a pretty big playing field, with the equivalents of our school and the elementary school from my world as two of the borders, the fence separating the school grounds from residential areas as the third, – which I’d have to ask about later, as there couldn’t possibly be that many people living here without knowing about this – and the entirety of a field as the last border. In the area itself, we had two playgrounds meant for the younger kids – the biggest place to take shelter. We also had these walls, as well as a few miscellaneous spots to escape from the open in.

I talked so “myself” – that is, myself from this world – for a moment to confirm where we were going. It would be smart to not stay out in the open, or go anywhere that was a common area. For us, it would be better to play smarter and not more offensively. We had talked about a strategy when we were getting our weapons, and we had both decided that it was better to play defensive, not offensive.

My teacher took over the role as the coach, saying, “I’m going to count down. When I say “GO!” the game will start. Then we’ll count down from ten, and you can only start shooting others when we hit zero.”

I saw nods of approval, and to signify that everyone understood the rules of the game. So my teacher started the countdown. “Three, two, one, GO!” And we all ran. Some of us went to the playgrounds. Some of us climbed up the “walls.” A few of us climbed up trees. Surprisingly enough, no one teamed up with each other. This was a bit unusual, as often, some people would team up, so they either couldn’t get out of the game as easily, or they could take down a “common enemy” more easily.

Anyways, myself and I went to the farther bleachers beside the field, and we crouched under them. We didn’t really see anyone for a while, so I took the time to see what was happening. I saw that the people from this dimension were trying to keep their teammate from my dimension alive, and I expected it, since we had no past training. Sure, we had gym, but that was nothing compared to this. This was much more extreme.

I also noticed that, like usual, the classes had split itself up into two general groups, and the teams from one group weren’t really going after the teams from the other group. It was expected. However, some people were straight out hunting their friends, actively trying to get them out of the game. At least, they were for about two minutes. Then they realized that their teammates from my world didn’t know how to use these guns. But they didn’t stop. The people from this world aimed at the people from my world this time, since they basically didn’t have any training at all. And one by one, each team fell, until there was only one team standing.

However, this just happened to be half of the class. The other half were still alive. At least, myself and I assumed they were alive. We couldn’t really see the playground from where we were. We could barely see the field to see who had survived and who hadn’t. So we moved. We ran to the playground and the “walls,” where people were battling. I guess it wasn’t as calm here as I thought.

Suddenly, everything happened at once. One moment, I heard a faint noise, and looked up. A bullet was coming straight towards me, and I didn’t even have time to duck before I was covered in red paint. At the same moment, however, myself from this world shot a bullet upwards, and someone, who was sitting in a tree, was shot. I guess we were both out now.

We made our way to where the teachers were standing, watching the game. Most of the class was there, hovering around or talking to one another. There were only three teams left.

One was shot, and they went down. We were down to two. It was pretty intense. They ran around for a while, each dodging the others' bullets. The borders were decreased to just the closer edge of the field. And finally, one of the people from my world was shot, and the other team won.

We all gathered around the teachers again, waiting for our next instructions. The teacher from this world said, "That was hard, wasn't it? Half of you had no training whatsoever. Now, you're going to be taught how to shoot and aim these guns properly. But first, we need to bring everything here."

We went back to the gym, and this time we went to the storage room at the left side of the gym instead of the one at the front. From there, we took out targets, similar to the ones used for archery, but made of a much stronger material. We wheeled the back outside and positioned them in front of the "walls," with five on each side of each wall. There were twenty targets total. One for each student pair.

The teacher explained what we would be doing now. "Each of you have to go back to your "pairs" and find a target to use as your "station." Then, the person from this dimension must teach the person from the visiting dimension how to use these guns. Don't just teach them how to use them, though, teach them how to be careful with them too." And with that, we all went off to learn how to shoot properly.

My "counterpart" and I chose a random station, and we started. She gave me a few tips on how to use the gun properly, as well as how to aim properly. But she also emphasized on how important it was to not be reckless, and look at what you're shooting at before actually shooting, because you might accidentally hit someone you don't want to hit. They were basic instructions, and it made sense, since giving me too much information at once probably wouldn't work anyways.

With all the instructions in mind, I started practising. It wasn't perfect – far from it, actually – but it was better than nothing. All around me, I could see my classmates practicing too. Some of them were actually good for their first try.

We practised for a bit, then put everything away and went back inside. However, I could tell that while the people from this dimension were completely fine with leaving Battle Training, the people from my dimension were not. I suspected that this would be the next thing we did during DPA.

Anyways, we went back to our classroom, where we were told to pack up because it was the end of the day. And that's when it hit me: The people from my dimension weren't at home, so where would we go? Apparently, a lot of other people in my class also had that sudden thought, as someone else asked that question to the teachers.

The teachers explained to the people from my dimension that this world was different from ours – this was essentially a boarding school, and the students didn't go home during the school year. They only went home during holidays, and some weekends. This was to reduce the risk of being found by the leader. The teachers told us that the students lived in houses near the school, as those were also protected by the machinery that kept the school from being found by the leader.

However, this brought on another question: What would happen to our world while we were here? I asked the teacher from this world, and he said that time would continue as always. This scared quite a few of us, because our families would probably be wondering where we were. However, we were told something that only made the situation worse.

The teacher said, "By now, the Takeover in your dimension has already started. If you go there now, there's no guarantee you won't be captured by the leader. It's safer to stay here," which only made us worry about our entire world even more. What was happening there?

"It's ok, our world will be fine in the end," said our teacher from my world, and it was kind of reassuring.

"Now, for where you will be staying. Our students already have living places near the school, but we have a few more houses available for you. We've already split you up into groups to decide where you will be staying. Oh, and by the way, as you head out the door, your teacher and I will be handing out wrist watches and phones. Please keep them with you, as they will be our primary source of contact should anything happen. We've sent you your house number and the directions to get there on the watches." And with that, we exited the school.

I was in a house with some of my friends. They had mixed us up, however, so that there would be some people from both dimensions in each house, so I wasn't with everyone. But I was, in a way, because there was one version of each of us in each house. So all nine of us, some friends and some strangers, now shared a living space. This would be...interesting.

The houses were pretty big, however, and seemed to be made for these types of things, since there were ten rooms in the house. This left adequate space for all of us, so none of us had to share a room.

Another thing I noticed was that all the necessities were already in the rooms. Did these guys spy on every detail of our lives? It was getting pretty creepy. But we didn't have much time to think about that for long, as we were more preoccupied by the furniture in the rooms. It had the same designs as we had seen on the things in the ships we had come here on, which probably meant that these designs were rather common here. I decided to leave the questions for later, as I went to the living room to meet up with my "roommates." They had said something about exploring.

When we had all met up, we decided to look around the place, top to bottom. We went in trios, since there were nine of us. One group took the bottom floor, the other took the ground floor, and my group took the top floor. And so we started our exploration.

On the top floor, we left the rooms unsearched, as those weren't common areas, and therefore not our things to search in. However, we did check all the walls...only to find nothing. We checked the floors too. Nothing. The doors? Nothing. We were all rather disappointed, since we all expected to find *something* interesting. Maybe they cleaned out the entire house before we moved in? That would explain why nothing was out of place.

We met up with everyone else again, to share the fact that there was nothing secret of interest in this house. They had the same results as us. So we, being the bored teenagers that we were, decided to try using the devices that we had been given. We spent a while on them, with the people from this world explaining to us the apps in this world – which were rather similar to the ones in my world.

We also noticed that the phones had numbers, and the numbers of everyone in my class, as well as the class of this world, were already added. Huh. They really did think of every detail. It was creepy, but at the same time, rather expected at this point. It seemed like they had been preparing for our arrival for a while.

We mostly just talked, with the people from the house with our counterparts, until dinner, and then we talked some more and shared some more theories on this place. At least, the people from my world did. The people from this world didn't. They were already too accustomed to their world, and dealt with too much already, to participate in that. Somebody suggested we tell horror stories, but some people refused, so instead we watched a movie. A really random movie that I'm certain existed as another version in my world.

The next morning, we all got up and went to school. It was odd for the people from my world, since our school year had *just* ended, and we had already learned everything we needed to learn. So instead, we spent most classes being told more about the history of this place, and being given more Battle Training time. When the class from this world had the classes that were new to us, we all went. And after the first days of those classes, the students from my world took those classes during the other students' regular classes along with Battle Training.

After a few days of this schedule, we fell into a pattern. We would get up, go to school, learn about history and the classes we didn't have in our world – which our teacher attended too – then spend leisure time after school. Just like a normal school day schedule.

The days blurred into weeks, and the weeks bled into months. Everything was peaceful – or at least, as peaceful as it could be with the prospect of a future war lurking sometime soon. My class got better at handling weaponry. We learned how to drive and fly properly. We were becoming fluent in battle strategies. We learned how to make and program machinery. We were so fluent at it that we worked on a project in our spare time. It seemed we were ready for if and when a war did happen.

One day, our teachers kept us inside, and we immediately knew something was wrong. We weren't allowed to go outside. We weren't allowed to go to the houses. We weren't even allowed to leave the room we were in. They said it was nothing at first. Then they couldn't hide it anymore. We all knew. The leader was coming. They had found us.

But little did they know that we were ready for them. We had planned everything out. We had designated drivers and pilots for the vehicles. We had designated people to control the machines we made. Even though the teachers didn't really want us going out there, we still would. We would help save this place, once and for all.

Their army approached us. I saw thousands upon thousands of people. I felt rather bad for them. They didn't want any of this, they were just being forced into it. But how could we save them? They were being controlled by someone, no, *something* at this point, who didn't care for anything but destruction. We would have to destroy this entire army.

The teachers didn't want us going out there, as I've said before, but what they didn't know was that they *needed* us out there. They needed us to end all this. They needed us to bring peace to this world. And they're the ones who gave us the skills to do this in the first place.

We walked outside, all forty of us, from two different dimensions. The army stopped to look at us, a group of kids, standing there so calmly. One of us held the secret weapon in our hands. It was what we had been working on for the last two months, ever since we had learned how to make and program machines. It was probably the best thing we had ever made.

Two of us, both "versions" of one person, walked out a bit ahead of us. "Leader, we know all you want is destruction. And we won't deny you that." One of them said.

"So destroy all you want...if you can," said the other one. And with that, we activated the machine. High-pitched noises that we couldn't hear filled the air. But they could hear it. The machines in their minds made them hear it. And there was nothing they could do about it. It couldn't be turned off. And they didn't even know what was happening. They didn't know that this machine was something that had never been made before. It was something that we had never even thought of before these two months. Even we weren't sure if it would work. But it seemed like it was working. The waves from the machine completely nullified the machines in their brains. They wouldn't stop the brains from functioning completely, but they would sever the

connection between their machines and the leader's. As waves and waves of people fell from brains that didn't function properly, we felt sorry for them, but at the same time, we were happy we could save them.

The doctors in the school carried the people into the building, one by one. This was literally most of the population they had to deal with. They would have to reprogram the machines so that they wouldn't have to be controlled anymore. But that was worlds better than killing them all in a war. So while we couldn't save everyone completely, we could save them from a lot more suffering.

Finally, when everything else had been dealt with, we went to the leader. He looked like he was on his deathbed at this point, struggling to talk, like one would in their last few moments of a painful death. I don't think anyone felt sorry for him, not after everything he did. But the doctors said that they would try to do what they could to heal him, after everyone else had been dealt with. They said that maybe now that he'd lost all power, he would go back to the way he was before. And if not, they could always threaten him with using the machine with the implants in his brain again. Right. The implants. They said they would try to remove those. But if the implants really were so similar to the ones everyone else had, why was he suffering so much worse? Yes, people wanted him to suffer, but pain doesn't really care about what the people want.

Finally, we realized he was trying to say something. Sure that it was just the senseless "Villain Last Words" of "You'll pay for this!" – or something along those lines – we didn't think much of it. But as we listened, we caught, "House 224" "Room 5" "In the floor" and "Diary." Before going limp. Yup. Classic deathbed words.

We decided that the people from this world would investigate, and the people from my world would go back to our own world to try to get rid of the leader's followers back there. And so we collected our stuff and said our final goodbyes, before heading back to the gym to exit the portal. Only to find nothing there. And the principal ran in, saying, "We're so sorry! It seems that when your machine was activated, it destroyed the machine opening the portals too. We'll find a way to get you back somehow, though."

Great. We're trapped in a world we don't belong in, and now we can't go home, and we don't even know what's happening there. Just amazing. But at least we have the leader's last words to go off of and figure out the mystery of. And besides, with our engineering skills, we'll be out of here in no time...right?