

“This is the really good part,” Gabe piped up with a smile.

“There’s no easy way to say this, so I will show you.” Sandy took off his long overcoat, set it on the bottom part of Dillon’s metallic bed, and slowly lifted up his black shirt. He grabbed the soft skin of his stomach and gently pulled outward. The skin started to separate until he had torn off a section larger than his hand. There was no blood. Dillon could see muscle tissue, but the grayish coloring made it look strange. The flesh held in Sandy’s hand then melted into his fingers as the opening in his stomach sealed perfectly back over itself.

Dillon was in awe, but the show was not over.

Sandy walked over to the metallic table where Dillon was sitting and rested his arm on it. A familiar tentacle formed out of the table’s surface and maneuvered directly over his hand. A vibrating noise emanated from the end of the tentacle, and the screen over Dillon’s head illuminated. Sandy pointed up at it and said, “Look, you can see the cells of my body. If we zoom in closer you will see the different components of a single cell.”

Another interruption came as the door to the cubicle slid open and the lanky Lian skidded in, his unkempt black hair covering one eye. When he saw what was happening a large, goofy grin filled his face.

“Oh, you’re at the fun part,” he commented, slightly out of breath.

Dillon looked back at the screen and saw the image zooming in on the cell. He started focusing on different shapes within the cell. He knew that human cells had a nucleus or brain center, but the cells on the screen contained two nuclei. One of them was moving with small, wiry arms that flailed around.

“The waving things are nanobots. As we became more and more technically advanced, we developed microscopic robots that could help the body fight diseases and even facilitate the uptake and distribution of medicines in cells. Eventually we learned how to make robots that could enter each cell and work harmoniously with our organic architecture, controlling even the cell’s DNA and reproduction.”

“So you are immortal then?” asked Dillon.

“No. We can live for a very long time, but we can be fatally injured.” Sandy smiled at the only joke he knew: “Also, viruses can be double-edged swords.” Dillon himself finally cracked a smile.

“Since we have merged with technology, we can’t survive in large mana fields. The nanobots inside either stop working or start sending mixed signals. This kills cells—and lives. Without the mana-controlling technology that the scientists stole, we can’t stop them in the past, present, or future.”

