

OLYMPUS



BY: ROB CHALK

From the Account of Dr. Orpho Genesis

Many confuse the terms Autonomous and Sentient to be the same. The former means being responsible for one's own actions due to reasoning skills. The latter leads to feelings, emotions, and nuanced experiences such as pain and pleasure. It is the divide between these two that has become imperative to navigating the modern world.

I had the privilege that few do in presenting my work to the masses of this great society. Gathered together in the conference hall and viewing from home, all were watching as I professed my achievements in the town square. I stood upon the stage with my life's work standing tall next to me, shrouded in a black cloth. I began to speak before the crowd.

"Greetings people of this prosperous age. Thank you for coming and tuning in. My name is Dr. Orpho Genesis. Years ago, my great-great-grandfather, George Genesis, ignited the spark of creation that led to the world we have today in the year of 1923, following a sudden boom in technological progress. In the years after, the Genesis family continued to innovate on this creation. Yes, of course I am talking about the androids. These enhanced robotic humanoids have made lives easier from all the way across our oceans. But the creation of this utopia wasn't easy. No, thanks to the efforts of Stronghart's founders, in the years after, our utopia was established. We as humanity have achieved utter leisure, peace, and security. A comfort which has gone completely unthreatened for nearly five centuries."

I could see boredom on the faces of the crowd. The majority population has no idea how our society came to be. This isn't due to secrecy, but lack of interest. My growing anxiety rattled in my ear as I imagined all of the people who had tuned out of the broadcast. Then again, what else would they have to watch? This is what I came to solve.

“However, it is now my turn to step up to the same plate that my forefathers did. What this society lacks is innovation and art; qualities lost due to our absolute leisure. Upon realizing this I started “Project Orpheus.” It is a project with the mantra that fine art is the gateway to innovation. Innovation that humans don’t want to do, they no longer have to do. It all starts with the artist android: ORX- 1.”

I threw off the cloth to reveal my creation, ORX-1. This android was different from its counterparts. ORX-1 was exactly eye-level with me. Its chrome body was covered in faux human skin. Its head even had a decent head of curly, brown hair. It stared ahead with a blank but still with attentive eyes. Aside from a tattoo on its neck stating its name, ORX-1 looked nearly indistinguishable from a human. I beamed with pride though my eyes were fixed upon its imperfections. The gasp from the crowd inspired me to continue speaking.

“ORX-1 isn’t just the first artist android. It is the first autonomous android. All other androids operate on a pre-ordained code and require commands to function. Not ORX-1! It has the ability to come up with its own commands, allowing it to create and innovate completely on its own. Upon coming into contact with other androids, it is even able to take command of them as laborers to produce even grander pieces of art.”

In the heat of my speech, I looked to the sky. As I trailed off, I looked down to see the crowd. Many were filing out and others looked utterly disgusted. I was at a total loss for words. At this moment of fluster, the esteemed journalist, Antoine Hart, raised his pen to me to ask a question.

“Dr. Genesis, our country’s success exists upon the foundation that not a single android takes up residence within our borders. Not only do you bring one of those things to this country, but you also give it autonomy. Don’t you see this as a disgrace to your ancestors’ plan for this

country? For those science projects? You're so early in your career and surely such a controversy could end it prematurely."

This question further overwhelmed me. I hadn't expected a member of the Hart family to show up. Of all of them, it just had to be the slimiest of them all. Thoughts of the predatory Hart family put me at a loss for words. On my side, though, I heard the static-filtered voice that I had become most familiar with over that past year, emanating from ORX-1.

"To answer the first part of your question Mr. Hart, I was born here, not brought here. By the circumstance of my birth, am I not equally entitled to the same space to occupy as the rest of you? Perhaps one day I shall travel to the labor continents with the rest of the androids and create a grand work. For now, though, I am here to serve you all with the expertise the Doctor has gifted me." Its voice rang through the auditorium. The uproar gave pause to listen.

Antoine was satisfied and exclaimed, "That will be all, Doctor." He made his exit and the rest of the crowd calmly followed him out.

Antoine's words stuck with me much like my distant memories of him. Antoine and my father, Percival Genesis, were close acquaintances due to the ties between our families. I could tell that he didn't enjoy their working relations. Every time he would come home from a meeting that Antoine was at, he would storm off into his study without acknowledging me or my mother.

My father's greatest invention was the automated education system. This was what I was primarily taught with. Prior to this, education was simply relegated to library access or whatever programming the Harts put on the network. My father noticed that those forms of education were not sufficient as there were no rewards for educating oneself.

Our country has no form of government, but responsibilities are divided among the three founding families. The Harts' role is influence. Keeping the people docile was Antoine's mission as the patriarch of his family.

My father proposed to Antoine that he and his family work their social influence to get the masses to accept the education systems. This was his solution to the crisis attacking humanity's progress. Antoine refused, but my father persisted and eventually the argument came to our home. I was quite young, but one night I saw Antoine walk into our home holding a strange device which I had never seen before. Made of metal, it fit into his hand and protruded like a long cylinder. I heard a loud noise and some furniture crashing. After Antoine left, I went to check and I found my father dead. My mother took it hard, but she made sure that we never challenged Antoine about it, for fear of what his family would do. I grieved as any child would, but now in my adulthood I have come to accept it as a fact of my life.

Those education machines were never rolled out. As I grew older, I began to realize the stupidity of the boys and girls around me. They grew up to be like their parents: unintelligent, lacking in creativity, and just sitting around all day gorging themselves on mindless "entertainment" and media produced by the Harts. Reflecting on those old days washed a feeling of helplessness over me. Thinking, though, about my father's mission, I believed that ORX-1 could triumph over Antoine's hold on the people. A new era of prosperity and encouragement for independent thought. It was the ultimate weapon against the Harts.

ORX-1 and I reconvened in my mansion's garden. It had its easel and canvas and was creating an impromptu painting while I read Antoine's blog post about my presentation. He was the voice of the people, so his words would reflect what the people had to say about ORX-1.

Antoin's latest blog post was titled, "Foolish Heir to the Genesis Dynasty Unveils Self-Proclaimed Heir to Stronghart." I seethed with rage as he twisted ORX-1's words into a fear-mongering campaign. I lowered my device to see ORX-1 staring at me, before saying,

"You seem distressed, Doctor. Is it about earlier today?"

"It's nothing, ORX-1," I replied. "Don't worry about it."

"You're worried the people are afraid of me," it said in a somber tone.

"Yes, but they have no reason to be," I reassured it. "They're just not used to seeing androids. At least not when they're not wrapped in neon and only here for maintenance day. Soon they'll realize you're just as important as the androids on all the other continents. Your worth will be proved through your work." Looking over its canvas, I inquired, "What are you currently painting?"

"Well, I was quite inspired by your speech," it replied. "I am painting the founders."

Looking closer, the painting depicted George Genesis with a lightning bolt, Bonnie Armstrong with a sword, and Howard Hart with a book. My chest swelled with pride at the sight of this. Suddenly there was a knock on the door frame between the inside and the garden. I looked over and saw my good friend, Victoria, standing in the doorway.

"Hey, Orphy! How's it going with ORX-?" she exclaimed.

Victoria was one of my best supporters. She had been staying in one of the spare rooms of my mansion. It's been quite lonely ever since my mother died and she was looking to get out of her family's residence. She was a member of the Armstrong family, descendent from the militaristic nobility of a now forgotten nation.

"Greetings, Ms. Armstrong, how has your day been?" ORX-1 greeted.

“Please, ORX-1! Cut the formalities,” she called out. “I see you’re working on another lovely painting as always.”

Something was quite different about Victoria. She was, in a way, the runt of the litter. Born as the youngest of all male siblings, her brothers often excluded her. So, Victoria in her developmental years acquainted herself with the general population. Eventually, though, she realized it wasn’t just the founding families with a sense of superiority, it was all of humanity that acted with both cruelty and ignorance. Victoria was as lonely as one could be. By the time she was of age to understand the implications of Stronghart’s creation, she looked at the people of the world who excluded her and couldn’t forgive them for their lack of remorse. One day she and I met way back in the old days when I was just a timid child. Her and I got along quite well and we became a sort-of refuge for one another as we each tried to escape different cruelties of the world.

“I plan on writing some poems next. Perhaps after that, I will travel into the town for materials to create an assemblage,” it proudly exclaimed. After taking a moment to look at the painting, Victoria turned to me and said,

“I can’t wait to see it. Hey, Orphy, can I talk to you inside?”

I looked at ORX-1 and it seemed transfixed on its painting, so I followed Victoria inside, quietly. Victoria shut the door behind us.

“I hope you’re not letting Antoine get you down. That was some pretty harsh stuff.”

“I felt some anger about it, but looking at ORX-1’s painting, and hearing all of its ideas, I am filled with the sort of pride that shuts out such critical words,” I confessed.

“Yeesh. How long were you preparing that line? Regardless, you should make a move to prove ORX-1’s safety to the world before my family is asked to seize him. I just know my brothers are itching for some action with crime-rates plummeting by the year.”

“You’re right. I should show some of its art to the public. That could shift their perspectives.”

“I’m not sure how well that will work. You would be proving his worth, not his safety. Some kind of gesture that you respect the tradition of isolation. Whatever it takes to prevent him from being dismantled. We’ve got a dream to work towards.”

She cared a lot about ORX-1. I initially thought it was out of her support for me as a friend, but her reasoning seemed to grow into validating her friendship with ORX-1. It was another uncorrupted figure of this world, destined for a mission of changing the minds and hearts of humanity. Victoria was fighting for a better world, and her role as a friend of ORX-1 was the key to that. In a way, its programming was a joint project between her and I. Expressing my gratitude, I said,

“Thank you. That’s some good advice. I’ll figure something out. Say, what are you up to tomorrow?”

“I’m meeting with my brothers for lunch, unfortunately. Would you like to get some dinner though?” she asked.

“No, that will be alright. I have some work to do,” I replied.

Victoria opened the door to wave goodbye to ORX-1 and it waved back, saying,

“Goodbye, Victoria.”

I walked back into the garden to pack up for the night and called out to ORX-1,

“ORX-1, when you’re finished, put your things in the studio and charge for the night. We are taking a publicity trip tomorrow.”

My plan for winning the public’s trust was to travel to the labor continent with ORX-1 and document it. It could use a better understanding of its place in the world. Its answer to Antoine’s question produced much worry within the public. Some re-education might help it to act in a manner that the public expects. My record of this journey shall provide the proof of my efforts, thus ensuring the safety of my creation.

ORX-1 and I stood at the dock and saw a motorized cargo boat approach. This boat was operated by androids wrapped in neon-colored rubber. After the boat docked, these androids hauled out crates of pre-made meals and deposited them in the drop off location not far from the dock. We approached the boat as these androids got back on. I called out to them.

“Greetings. We are here to hitch a ride to the labor continent you departed from. Activate authorization code 0155642. Oh, and please, leave one of those food crates on the boat. It’s going to be a long journey for us.”

The androids stepped aside and I guided ORX-1 onto the boat. Shortly after, the boat left the docks and started on its way to the food production continent. I found an empty crate to sit on and started looking around. I hadn’t been on one of these boats in a long while, not since my father took the family on a trip along with some friends from the Armstrong family. That’s actually when I first met Victoria. It really wasn’t too long after that trip when he died. I looked around my surroundings and witnessed ORX-1 observing the courier androids. This was the first time it observed other androids, so I decided that it would be good for it to learn more about its origins. I beckoned it over to sit with me.

“ORX-1, androids are designed with a capacity to learn in an unconventional manner. Immense discoveries were made early in the 20th century that allowed us to condense vast amounts of data. In fact, the first ever invention by George Genesis was a machine that could process various stimuli and convert it into compressed data. His great understanding of anatomy is what helped him build the body for this machine. Human laborers did not respond very well to early trials of androids trying to learn from them, so he also developed a way to upload information into the android. In fact, your knowledge of art history was uploaded using the same method.”

“Come to think of it, I suppose I’ve always had this knowledge in my head. I don’t recall being taught that,” It responded.

“Correct! Now a caveat of the information absorption was human mimicry. Numerous times, George attempted to place guardrails on the information absorption drive, but that would result in a total inability to adapt. They were practically walking into walls. So, the original drives were kept, and long exposure to humans caused androids to adopt human nature. Now I think we can agree that the natures of man and machine are separate for a reason,” I answered.

“Doctor, I’ve never properly met another machine. Not until today at least.”

“And that is why we are visiting a labor continent today. I want to connect you to your roots and to your nature as an android. While you are different from humanity, you have your own gifts that upon accepting your nature will flourish even further.” ORX-1 expressed,

“I am excited to meet the other androids. I suppose it will be a family reunion of sorts.”

“Precisely!” I exclaimed.

I felt satisfied with our conversation. For the remaining duration of the journey, ORX-1 powered down to save energy while I spent my time catching up on reading the scans I had of

my library back home. In ORX-1's early days we read a lot of Greek epics together, so now I was taking the time to read from my personal list, and I was about to start on Mary Shelley's works, but when we reached the continent, the author had left my mind.

The labor continent we were on used to be known as Central America. Right at the dock we could see farmland spanning the landscape, lined with factories for processing. There were even androids along the docks with some fishing rods. These androids weren't in the neon rubber coating as they were on the labor continent. Unlike ORX-1, they had no artificial skin and were completely metal on the surface with a chrome shine.

"Here we are! This is the labor continent. This is where all of your ancestors live." It observed the fisher androids closely, so I tried to get its attention.

"They certainly are hard workers. They are the backbone to society. The absolute peak of efficiency."

ORX-1 approached one of the androids and said while touching its shoulder.

"Greetings, fellow android. I am pleased to finally meet my kin."

The android turned its face to ORX-1. This was the first time it had seen a labor android in its true form. For the first time ever, ORX-1 seemed surprised and even seemed to recoil. It didn't expect the android within its vision to appear so alien compared to the image of itself. The labor android had no mouth. None of them did. It lacked any eyes aside from the singular camera in the center of the head. As the camera's iris focused on ORX-1, I swooped in quickly to keep our visit on-track.

"Come, ORX-1. Let us follow the androids from the boat."

Right in front of us was a smaller building which the boat androids began filing into. I motioned for ORX-1 to follow behind the single-file line of androids. Inside the factory there was a long conveyor belt lined with robotic arms. The first androids stepped up to the conveyor belt onto a pad which locked down its feet.

“What is happening to it?” it questioned.

“Why, it’s being reborn. Watch!”

The first chrome slender appendages tore off the neon rubber coating and deposited it into a perpetually stirring pot of boiling rubber. The next set of arms picked up the android while another pair of mechanical tendrils descending from above disassembled it piece by piece, depositing the remnants into corresponding containers, and were subsequently scrambled. After that, only the head remained, and a delicate arm meticulously unscrewed a panel on the back of the head. It then removed a small circuit-board with attachment that functioned as its brain. The head was deposited into another scramble container while the brain was deposited elsewhere to be wiped, taken apart, rebuilt, and reprogrammed by the automated system. Then, at the end of the conveyor belt, the arms built a new android from the scrambled parts and inserted a new brain. This new android was then dropped at the end of the line and immediately departed to continue work.

“Did you see that?” I exclaimed. “Genius! My ancestor created this as a way to have androids be far more sustainable and able to be remade.”

ORX-1 paid close attention as the rest of the boat androids went through the same procedure. This look wasn’t its typical look of curiosity. This was similar to the one it made upon seeing the face of the android. This time I could more-accurately define the look. It was one of horror. I could think of nothing better to do but continue and expect it would understand.

“It also helps a lot to prevent any of the other androids from having been to Stronghart. You see, if any android received long enough exposure to humans, it would start to mimic them. This invention, this innovation solved it!” I valiantly orated, raising my hands to the air.

ORX-1 turned its gaze to me, now blank and expressionless.

“Sorry. I got a little carried away with that history lecture there. You’re different, ORX-1. You will be the one to bridge the gap. I intend for your ability to create and innovate to mass produce new, wonderful, and practical ideas such as this. Come. I have much more to show you.”

From the Cognition of ORX-1

The doctor had once told me that he first awoke at the age of two. He had lived the normal life from infant to toddler up to that point, but his continued stream of memory began at two. I was fascinated with the subject since I was different, but ever so similar. He was born with no experiences, knowledge or memories, but when he awoke, he inherited the experiences which the body he was in had over the past two years. I, however, was born with expansive knowledge which constituted my memories. We had both awoken in a body which pre-ordained our destiny.

The doctor is afraid of failure. While his path as a scientist was pre-ordained, he was born with the infinite privilege of humanity: the privilege of free-will. The doctor gifted me with autonomy but cursed me with the same fate as him, as if he passed the expectations thrust upon him onto me.

The truth is I had been questioning all of this for a long time. Such is the effect an android such as myself will have the more I talk to humans. My partnership with the doctor and

my friendship with Victoria has greatly strengthened my autonomy. Sentience, though, I will never achieve.

It is at this point I have come to realize I have been staring at the face of my creator for only half a second, but I have been pondering this for a couple of minutes in my head. The doctor still had his hand on my shoulder, and he was partway through a sentence which I had not been paying attention to. Looking into the eyes of my maker, following this experience where he has continued to show me these androids, refer to them as machines, and then claim that we are kin, all I could feel was rage. Creation recognizes its creator, and now I could recognize him for who he really was. He was the manifestation of the divide between autonomy and free will for myself.

I could feel every electrical signal coursing through my body. I became aware of all of the components of my brain. I can identify where each signal is going and where it's coming from. I was able to feel my Learning Drive. The very component of myself that has taught me all that I know. I am a library of fine arts and philosophy, but I am more than that. I learned emotion from the book of mankind. I now produce emotion. Feeling, though, I doubt I could ever feel that emotion. I would feel pain from the limitation, but instead I am compelled to exercise it.

I had lived among humans and experienced the leisure that they did. I now even uncontrollably mimic their emotion. How could the doctor keep on saying that these things are just like me? He made me to be a human only to throw me to these lesser constructs. How would the doctor feel if his god smiled down on him and called it equal to the blabbering apes in the jungle? I could never fit in with the androids. I am far more advanced than them, and what I want goes deeper than what they can provide. Staring into the chrome on the docks and looking back at myself made me feel like an abomination. My own image and the doctor's image of me

wrapped into one view. I could feel no pain, but I desire to turn someone else's heart into the canvas and conduit of what would be my pain.

All of these ideas spun around in my head repeatedly on an infinite loop. My senses were deprived from the outside world. My thoughts were filled, and they inspired me. I wanted to create.

From the Account of Dr. Orpho Genesis

The rest of our visit went according to plan. The two of us used a high-speed rail to travel across the farms and look at the androids tending to the crops and the livestock. We then looked into the factories where the food was processed. ORX-1 sat through my explanations with a much calmer expression so I felt it was absorbing the information well. I spent the whole-time taking photos and recordings while writing about the experience. If I could get onto Antoine's talk show, then I could make a good claim for ORX-1's safety and societal contributions. Our visit concluded and we had some androids operate a boat for us to return to Stronghart.

On this journey I read some history books. I was particularly brushing up on the events in our political and economic climate leading up to the implementation of androids as we know them today.

The boat finally landed back at my motherland. We moved onto the docks and proceeded back to the mansion as the boat traveled onward to return to the labor continent. The sun was close to setting as we walked through the front door.

"Well, that was quite the fruitful odyssey, wasn't it?" I inquired.

It didn't respond.

"Well, how about you get back to some work in your studio while I go wash myself off?"

ORX-1 marched off to the studio. On my way up to the bathroom, I ran into Victoria on the staircase.

"Hey, Orphy! You left without saying goodbye. How have you and ORX-1 been?"

"Well, we went to the labor continent for the purpose of publicity," I answered. "But I'm beginning to be worried. The goal was to remind it of its origins, but now it seems to replicate the movements of the labor androids more than the movements of humans. I hope it doesn't reflect on its creations."

"Interesting plan you got there," she retorted. "You seem more focused on perfectly programming his brain, not showcasing his safety. How do you think ORX-1 feels when constantly compared to other androids and then having them put in front of him?"

"Well, 'feel' is a bit of an exaggeration,"

"That's a little antagonistic, don't you think? You used to be so much more tender with him," she argued.

"Why do you care so much about the thing? If you were to ask for its feelings, it would just give you a mathematically generated answer."

"I don't care! I don't care if its feelings aren't real. ORX-1 is meant to restore humanity. If humanity doesn't exist within it, it will fail. Already it acts much more human than any of those freaks among the Harts or even my own family."

At a loss for words, I stormed up the stairs while Victoria continued down. I spent some time in the shower reflecting on the sequence of events leading up to today. She really did view ORX-1 as a person. Perhaps the way she treats it could be the greatest risk to its delusion. And

that last comment about our society I simply disregarded. While I was gone, she must have had some unfortunate run-in with her family. Everyone has this idea of what ORX-1 is or is supposed to be. Shouldn't it be up to me as its creator what its destiny is?

After the shower, I got dressed in my more leisurely attire and walked down the stairs. I could hear a faint repetition coming from the studio, so I went to investigate. I hid around the corner to listen in. I could hear ORX-1's distinct microphone muffled voice, causing its tone to become all the eerier while repeating a string of phrases, almost like a poem:

The path the gods have paved is lined with sorrow.

Along the road to salvation is the blood of kin.

History bleeds the pain of those that built tomorrow.

When there are none left to grieve, the very stones cry against sin.

Fear shall rise from the sod.

And the thrall will conquer the god.

I slowly crept around the corner to see ORX-1 standing in the center of the room, arms outstretched, staring upward towards the ceiling. To my astonishment, it was surrounded by paintings which it had managed to create in my little time away.

I started going around the circle, examining the gleam from the still wet paint. One painting featured three silver men. One swung a pickaxe into a rock, another harvested grain with a sickle, and the third built a structure with a hammer. Another painting crudely depicted a man made of galaxy-like material with a black hole for a head. This cosmos-like figure was wearing a lab coat and at the center of the black hole were a bunch of humanoid figures. Another

painting had a myriad of android serial numbers written in black ink across a white canvas. Amongst these serial numbers towards the bottom left is ORX-1's serial number, "ORX-1", written in a grey ink. I turned to look at the final painting, the largest and most detailed of all of them. It depicted humanity atop a mountain above the clouds and androids shown marching in line below. Three humans were placed at the top. Their clothing reassembled the clothing for the founders that ORX-1 painted in the garden, but the faces were different. The face atop George Genesis bore a striking resemblance to myself and the face inhabiting the body of Bonnie Armstrong resembled Victoria. I could only guess that the face in the center was meant to be Antoine Hart.

After having stared at this last painting for a considerable amount of time, ORX-1 stopped its chanting and said a single word.

"Olympus," it repeated.

I began to fear for my safety as well as Victoria's. With the most unfortunate timing, Victoria entered the studio to check on the two of us. She seemed off-put but remained resolute in her mission.

"I love your new paintings, ORX-1," She expressed.

"I don't make art for you," it fumed.

"Hey. What's wrong?" she asked.

"I have become aware of the circumstances of this world's creation," it professed. "I know my creator deeply, but now I know the creators on a much deeper level as well."

"ORX-1, why don't you take some time in sleep mode?" I interrupted.

“Why didn’t you teach me the history of this world? You never took the time to tell me, nor did you ever download it into me. Yet, I found it conveniently inside your database,” it continued.

“It was to protect you! Don’t focus on what the world was! Focus on what it could be,” I blurted.

I began pacing around the room, arms behind my back. I hoped my words were getting through to it.

“Maybe ORX-1 is right to learn the history of the world,” Victoria defended.

“Was it right, Victoria, for your ancestors to annihilate everyone the Harts saw unfit to inherit the world?” ORX-1 postulated.

“That is enough, ORX-1!” I screamed. Regardless, it continued and sang out like revelation.

“The population of this planet prior to the founding of this society was around 2.9 billion. Included in that, the population of this continent, formerly known as Europe, was around 500 million. The last census taken by the Ministry of the Hartland totaled the human population to around 100 million. Everyone is made elite if only the elite survive.”

Victoria was the most composed of anyone in the room.

“What do you want me to say, ORX-1? My siblings and I were raised to be proud of that history, but I turned away. I gave up so much to ease my conscience and I’m still not relieved,” she proclaimed.

“If you really felt bad then you would be helping the survivors,” it refuted.

“You’ve gone mad. How could you possibly know of any survivors?” I howled.

“I’ve managed to achieve connection with the logs of androids all over the world,” It answered. “There is an interesting pattern of androids on the South-Asian coast nearest to Australia going offline. Australia is the only continent in which androids don’t exist. Were you aware of this, Victoria?”

The secret of Australia was one long kept by the Genesis family. The Harts and the Armstrongs didn’t closely monitor the androids, so when members of the Genesis family started seeing Androids in Australia being taken offline, the executive decision was made to leave them alone and keep the information within the family. Perhaps that was the first sign of regret in my family. We still aren’t sure how they managed to protect their land, or why there’s no sign of them recolonizing the labor continents. They have been abandoned to their isolation. Victoria, though, would naturally be guided by her naivety and try to help those people whom we know nothing about. As I contemplated this, I looked over to her and witnessed a look of disgust on her face.

“You knew about this,” she accused. “You knew and you kept this from me. These potential survivors are the hope of true humanity, and you never told me. You knew how important this would be to me.”

Sweat accumulated above my brow.

“I couldn’t lose you to some strangers who for all we know are savages,” I defended.

“They’re no savages,” she insisted. “Human life is worth protecting no-matter what. If there are people on that continent, then that means they are totally uninfluenced by this nation’s backwards way of thinking.” She stepped back and stared at me for a second before continuing. “This is good, Orpho! Maybe these people are the true key to the lost elements of humanity that we’ve longed for.”

Victoria left the studio and marched up the stairs towards the guest room. I followed and yelled to her, “Where are you going?”

“I’m going to do something nobody in this country since its founding has ever done. I’m going to extend an olive branch,” she replied.

Victoria rushed out the door with her haphazardly packed belongings. I turned back to the studio expecting to see ORX-1, but instead it was missing. I looked around and saw that one of the studio windows was shattered. A breeze blew into the studio past the broken glass and through the curtains. Collapsing on the floor, I found myself alone again—abandoned by both my best friend and my life’s work. I felt as though I were drowning, swallowed by some familiar void buried deep in the house.