

Resistance

He couldn't sleep. How could he *possibly* sleep on a night like this? Allen Carter was on the fifth year of his thirty year sentence in the UGO's toughest – and filthiest – prison, The Cage. He didn't even know the real name of the place. All he'd ever called it, or heard anyone else call it, was The Cage. No one had ever broken out, even though security there wasn't the highest on the planet. It didn't need to be. The prison was surrounded by a 4-mile radius of poisonous air. Anyone who left the walls of the building would choke to death within seconds without the proper respirator mask, which is exactly why he'd spent the last year saving up enough money to pay his only friend in the prison, Marco, to steal one from guard barracks. Marco had been well-behaved for the past few years, and over time had worked his way up to janitor duty, allowing him a small window of access to the guard barracks on days when the on-duty guards were absent-minded enough to leave the room without locking the door. But stealing a respirator mask was no small matter, as soon as the guards realized one was missing, they'd lock down the entire prison and ransack every single cell in place until they found who had stolen it. That's why Carter knew it had to be stolen on the same day he planned to use it to make his escape.

He laid there on his mat staring up into the pitch-blackness of his prison cell after lights-out. He'd spent the past 3 hours this way, churning over the details of the getaway, visualizing each step of the escape over and over and over. He knew this was his only shot. If he failed this time, he'd be locked-up in solitary confinement for the rest of his life. But, he'd already figured out several different ways to commit suicide if he was ever faced with that hellish fate. Of course, there was also the possibility that he'd be shot by a guard trying to make a run for it. Either the he got a way unseen, or he died – one way or another. It was amazing he was able to drift off to sleep on the eve of such a fateful day, and as he did so, his mind became occupied by the haunting memories of what had landed him there in the first place...

"Slow down, you're going too fast, we don't need to give the cops any reason to pull us over."

"Relax, Carter, I'm not going that fas-"

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“You’ve gotta be fucking kidding me!” Carter yelled, the sound of police sirens cutting off his partner before she could finish the sentence.

“Oh, shit. Oh, shit. What do we do?”

“Calm the fuck down, first of all. Everything’s hidden and shielded. There’s no way they can find anything. Let me talk to him.”

The police officer approached the driver-side window of the car. After checking Carter’s and his partner Ally’s ID’s, he pulled out his handheld x-ray scanner and began checking the entire car.

“What are you so nervous about, you know there’s no way he can find anything with that,” Carter said, attempting to reassure his partner everything was fine.

“Actually...”

“What!?”

The cop’s scanner beeped wildly, detecting an unshielded bag of weapons hidden in the floor of the car. He was standing right in front of the passenger-side door. Ally shoved the door open with all her strength, sending the slimly-built officer flying back several feet to the ground. Before he could get back to his feet, Carter was on top of him, swinging wildly and landing a few blows to the head and face. The cop made no attempt to hit back, instead desperately fumbling for the tazer connected to his belt. Carter changed strategies and now attempted to restrain the officer’s arms, knowing if he allowed him to get hold of this tazer the fight would be over immediately and he’d wake up in a jail cell, with Ally beside him. In a massive surge of adrenaline, Carter lifted the officer off the ground and slammed him back down, landing with all his weight on top of the officer’s back. The body went limp. Carter was taken aback; he hadn’t expected this fight to end so early. Cautiously climbing to his feet and shuffling closer to the officer’s head, he discovered why – the sharp corner of a large buried rock making a small dent in the corner of cop’s head, and a rapidly growing pool of blood around his face. Looking over his left shoulder, he met eyes with his horrified partner as they simultaneously realized the unthinkable.

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Carter awoke to a still-pitch black cell; he must not have been asleep as long he had thought. He didn't mind, it was a miracle he'd gotten any at all. Recalling the dream, he began to reminisce of last years of his life before The Cage.

He was a member of a rebel group who had become known as the Resistance. He was young, but climbing the ranks quickly. His intelligence and natural leadership ability earned him respect wherever he went. The Resistance had grown in response to the escalating oppression of the ruling class. In some sense the Resistance had always existed – militias, revolutionaries, and rebellious political factions had been around since the beginning of any attempt to govern human beings. But as the oppressions and the rulers became more obvious and more bold, the Resistance grew from small underground cells to a massive movement. By 2050, for the first time in history the world lived under one government, the United Global Order. Countries, states, provinces and other borderlines still existed, but it was merely an illusion; most people knew they were all living under the same control. The outlawing of citizen possession of firearms was a tipping point for many, including Carter, who fell conveniently into the role of weapon smuggler. But for most, the reeducation camps were the last straw. Citizens could be detained without warning or explanation, and it wasn't rare to never see them again. As soon as they lost a friend or family member to the camps, as soon as the UGO kicked down their door with their heavy black boots, their other-worldly armored suits, and their twisted black masks, people knew it wasn't a game anymore, and they jumped on board with the Resistance. Many felt their chances were bleak.

Feeling restless Carter rose from his bed. Dawn was only an hour or so away, and it was pointless to try to go back to sleep. Soon, it was time for breakfast and the prisoners were released one

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block at a time to head to the cafeteria. Carter met up with Marco and sat at the same table they had every day for the past eight years.

“Whadda we got today?” Marco grumbled, staring at the bland, colorless food in front of him.

“Same crap as always,” Carter mumbled back.

“Actually, this French toast is the best stuff they serve here. Not too bad. “

“I’ll trade you mine for the rest of your eggs.”

“I’ll take that deal,” Marco replied enthusiastically. “What’s the matter, man, you look like shit.”

“Barely slept last night.”

“Oh, yeah,” Marco said as a hint of a knowing smile showed itself before he quickly neutralized the expression.

He was the only one in the prison that knew this was the day Carter would make his escape, and they kept their conversation as ordinary and mundane as possible. Until the plan was in action, everything had to remain completely normal. It wasn’t until the afternoon, during the recreation hour, that Carter would make his first move. Everyday around one o’clock the trash truck came to haul away the jail’s garbage, and today Carter planned to ride out on that trash truck. First, he’d need to get himself into one of the dumpsters that would get emptied into the truck. After months of observation, he’d figured he could slip away during rec hour while the guards were looking the other way. Through years of developing friendships with the right inmates, he’d gained knowledge of the layout of key areas of the prison. There was a door adjoining the rec yard to the janitorial storage which could be used to get to the garbage processing area. Once there he would simply climb into one of the dumpsters and bury himself under the piles of bags. There wouldn’t be any guards in the storage area, and the garbage processing area would have some, but not in the area he’d need to get to, so he figured it would be quite easy to sneak into a dumpster. Of course, once there he was not home free. He wasn’t the only one who’d realized hiding in the garbage would get you a ride straight out of the prison. The guards

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were well aware of this too, and every day it was one of their jobs to stab a six-foot metal spike thoroughly throughout each dumpster, ensuring no human cargo was hidden inside. A stab from the spike would be lethal if it hit the wrong spot, but that was unlikely. Carter figured at worst he'd take a flesh wound from the spike, and at best he'd be able to avoid it entirely either by shifting around the bottom of the dumpster, or just out of sheer luck.

Once he got past the spike, he'd simply have to remain hidden until the truck came and dumped the contents into its container area. If he could make it inside the truck, he should be able to ride it right out the front gates of the Cage. He really didn't know where it would take him, or if he should even stay onboard until it got to its destination. If it dumped it out in an area where there were people around, surely someone would call the police when they saw a man in an orange prison jumpsuit emerge from the mountain of trash. It may be better to jump from the truck in an isolated area and from there plan a more careful entrance back into civilization.

"I had that dream again. About killing the cop. Sometimes it still feels as surreal as the moment it happened," Carter confessed.

"I know you didn't mean it, man. You may be the one guy locked-up in this place that doesn't deserve it."

"He was just a kid. Couldn't have been more than 23, 24 years old. He looked scared to death. Was probably his first stop. Thought it'd be a routine speeding ticket, next thing you know he's on the ground with a broken skull," Carter said staring distantly into space.

They'd had this conversation before, but he still couldn't make eye contact as he revealed his thoughts; the guilt was too much. He'd killed before, but never like this; never in hand-to-hand combat. He'd been in a handful of confrontations with UGO forces before, gun battles at mid to short range that had ended with several casualties, but then he was shooting at anonymous armored soldiers, their faces made alien by their black goggles and high-tech gas masks. This was the first time he'd come face-to-

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face with what'd he done, face-to-face with the man whose life he'd ended, and it disturbed him more deeply than he'd thought possible.

"You panicked; you were just a kid too, remember? You're never gonna get over it, but torturing yourself with every painful detail isn't gonna help you at all," Marco said wisely, hoping to calm him down.

"Yeah...I know you're right. Besides, I've got other things I should be focused on," Carter replied, finally making eye contact with Marco.

They finished the rest of their meal without much conversation. Returning to his cell, Carter's mind was back on the escape. The hours leading up to it were agonizing. Back in his cell, he forced himself through his daily routine; brushing his teeth, stretching, reading, writing; but his mind was absent and his body moved through the motions automatically. Four more hours to go. Sometimes the time seemed to be passing slowly, and other times it seemed to take giant leaps forward. Despite all the planning, doubts still lingered in his mind, variables that were beyond his control. *What if they see me slip out of the yard? What if there's an extra guard I don't know about? What if the trash truck doesn't come today? What if I they get me with the spike!?* They were all fair concerns. The plan should work assuming everything was normal, but any number of things could go wrong. He hated to have to rely on chance, but today he was hoping to have a bit of luck on his side.

At noon, the fateful hour arrived, the cell doors slid open and the prisoners – escorted by half a dozen armed guards – made their way to the yard. It was a beautiful day; not a single cloud in the sky. Carter figured the temperature was in the mid-sixties, a gentle breeze was blowing. How sweet it would be to taste freedom on this day, he thought. He couldn't help but smile ear-to-ear at the thought of it as he walked out the door and sun met his face. Marco and some others came out behind him and walked to the left, where the weightlifting equipment was. Most days Carter would join them, but today went to the right and began his other slightly less common routine of walking in counter-clockwise loops

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around the perimeter or the large square yard. It was the perfect thing: from the outskirts of the yard he could observe almost all that was going on while maintaining a completely normal appearance. He made mental notes of the guards and their movements. So far, everything was normal: a guard in each corner, one guard in each of 2 towers, and one more walking the same circular pattern around the yard as he was. The circling guard and the guards in the far corners shouldn't present much of a problem; it was the tower guards and the one in the corner nearest the storage entrance that had a chance of spotting him. This is where Marco's distraction would come in. Starting an altercation in the prison was not difficult; fights broke out every day over the most trivial reasons. It was simply a matter of accusing someone of stealing a cigarette, and Marco was almost immediately in a shoving match with fellow inmate. The diversion was carefully timed. As Carter's lap brought him to the storage entrance, Marco started the fight and the guard nearest the door hurried over. A quick glance upward ensured him the tower guards eyes were on the fight as well.

With a swift move, Carter slid through the door, opening it just enough for him slip by. Inside, Carter paused, pressing his back against the wall and holding his breath momentarily. He turned his head quickly to the left and the right several times, confirming he'd gotten in unseen. With that, he let out the breath he'd been holding and crouched. Now his heart was pounding and adrenaline coursing through his veins. He'd taken the first step toward his escape, and turning back was no longer an option. From inside the storage area there was no way to tell where guards were positioned in the yard. If he attempted to turn back and mix back into the crowd, he could easily be spotted exiting the prohibited area. He had to escape...or die trying.

It was dark in the hallway, lit only by dim yellow lights, making it just bright enough to see where you were going. There was an ambient sound of some unseen machinery dominating the corridor. It's loud, constant drone and the darkness of the hall worked to Carter's advantage. With slow,

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planned movements, he made his way down the corridor toward his next goal: the waste processing center.

Arriving at the end of the corridor, he took cover around the corner and peered into the processing center. It was much more well-lit there, and to his relief the guards were positioned exactly where he'd expected them to be. Two were in the control room about twenty-five feet above in the center of the room, three other inmates who'd taken jobs here were sorting through the garbage as it came in on conveyor belts, and another two guards were stationed just outside the huge garage doors that opened to allow the trucks to enter. This was obviously the source of the noise; the roar of the conveyor belt motors reverberated around the rectangular cement-walled room and grew to a level probably making it impossible to talk to someone more than five feet away. About thirty meters separated him from the waste containers he was to stow away in. They were red and made of metal, about nine feet long and five feet tall. When he reached them he should have no trouble throwing himself over the side in a single leap. He began to plan his path through the room. The overhead guards in the control room were the biggest threat, the two guards out front had their backs turned, and three inmates were working busily attempting to keep up with the endless flow of the conveyor belt. Obviously it was necessary to avoid detection from the guards, but he was unsure of how the inmates would respond if he saw him. Would they even realize he wasn't supposed to be there? Even if they did, would they care? Would they attempt to alert a guard? Carter doubted it, but he decided still to make as much effort to avoid them as the guards, for even an unintentional gasp from one of them or a bewildered stare in his direction could give him away.

His footsteps suppressed by the ambient sound, he could move as fast as he wanted. He darted out from his cover in the corridor and slid to a halt about five meters ahead behind a section of the belt that didn't seem to be in use. It would provide cover for another ten meters or so, but then there was nothing but open space between him and the containers. Reaching the end of the belt, he formulated

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the next step of his escape. As he gazed up he realized the two control room guards had risen from their chairs. One was reaching out toward a large yellow lever on the wall. As he flipped the switch, the conveyor belts stopped and all the sound instantly dropped from the room. The change was so dramatic the room seemed to instantly transform into a different world. Suddenly he could hear the idle chatter among the guards. He could hear their movements and footsteps, and now they could hear his, too. There was a bigger problem, though. The flipping of the switch had signaled some sort of a change. The belts stopped and now the guards were moving towards the center of the room, toward the containers. The inmates were leaving, and Carter quickly realized why. Their job was now done; the containers had been filled, the belts had been shut off, and now the guards were coming in from outside. He had only seconds to hide himself in one of the trash containers before the two guards got too close. The careful, deliberate movements that had gotten him this far were abandoned as he made a desperate sprint for the near side of the container. Reaching it at full speed, he put his hands on the rim of the container as he simultaneously sprung off both feet and whipped his legs over the edge.

The garbage bags offered a soft landing place. As he hit them he sunk down just a bit, but wasted no time in burying himself as deep as possible in the five-foot-deep pile. The necessity for speed and necessity for stealth battled each other as he scurried to bury himself without alerting the approaching guards, whom by now couldn't be more than thirty meters away. He kicked his legs and swept his arms frantically, slowly making his way down. After several seconds, the sound and feel of his fingernails scraping against metal confirmed he had reached the bottom. Pulling his legs tightly into his chest, he curled into ball and went silent. Now the guards couldn't be far away, and he waited and listened, hidden beneath the mountain of waste, to assess the situation.

“So there's no way to get rid of it?”

“No. Once you get it, you have it for the rest of your life.”

“Shit!”

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To his relief, Carter could hear the guards conversing as they reached the containers. From under the pile, Carter could hear them ascending the small metal step-ladders on either side of the container. From there they would each use their steel spikes in the crude but effective security measure that he was dreading. He had only seconds now to prepare in what little way he could for the impending onslaught. Currently, he was laying half on his stomach and half on his left shoulder. He wiggled subtly to position himself lying flatly on his left side, providing a slimmer profile for the spike to connect with while keeping his heart on the lower side of his body, as protected as possible. Upon shifting he spotted something that could save his life: a piece of ply wood approximately two square feet appeared just inches in front of his face. He reached for it and slid it over him. It only covered his head and upper torso, but it was better than nothing. It worked well as a psychological barrier and he instantly felt more comfortable with it in place. In reality, it would certainly soften a blow, but it was doubtful it could stop one completely. With the board in place, he braced, drew in a long, deep breath, and waited.

Crunnchh!.....crrrunch!.....crrrunnch! The steel spike tore its way through the garbage with ease, unhindered by the mostly soft materials. The thrusts were more powerful than he'd expected. Intimidation began to set in, although he tried to deny it. The weight of the spike seemed to be more than he estimated, and he suddenly found himself trembling as he realized just how much pain would be arriving momentarily. It seemed like it was taking forever for the spikes to make their way over to him; the guards were doing a more thorough job than he'd anticipated. He felt his heart rate increase. As each spike tore effortlessly through the pile, each grotesque crunch and scrape and crack reminded him of how horribly wrong things could turn.

Part of what made the wait so hard was that he couldn't see the spike; he could only sense it through the sound and the vibration as it speared through the pile. It felt only inches away from his feet at this point, and he braced helplessly in the bottom of the container, knowing only luck could save him from a brutal end. The first stab must have been only inches from his ankles. He felt it easily slide

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through the debris and then heard the metallic clang as it reached bottom. Instinctively, he thought momentarily about shifting. But what good would it do? There was no way to know if he was shifting into safety or directly into the spike's deadly path. Again, a wave of helplessness came over him and he once again surrendered himself to fate. Another gash tore through right behind the bend of his knees, feeling a little closer than the previous one. He inhaled deeply.

"Hhrrrrmmpphhh," he let out a grunt of pain as the next stab sliced through the meat on the front of his thigh. His vision flashed red and yellow. The shock of it hit him harder than anything. His hands and feet now trembling, he wondered how loud his grunt had been – and how bad his wound was. Then came another stab, this one farther away than the other three. Concentrating on his wounded leg, he figured it wasn't too bad, although it was difficult to feel with his body coursing with adrenaline and endorphins. The next stab was probably a foot away again. He was relieved that the guard had seemed to choose a different trajectory for his spike now that he was in line with Carter's unprotected and vulnerable midsection. A blow there would have been very serious.

The next spike came down heavy just inches in front of his chest. For what it was worth, the plywood was still in place over his head and upper torso; any blow from here up would be dampened by the barrier. Carter wondered how effective it would be, especially now that he'd experienced firsthand how heavy the blows really were. Just then, he got his answer as the wood splintered easily and the spike penetrated the flesh of his right shoulder.

"Mmmpppphhh," he groaned again. His eyes flashed red and yellow and he gritted his teeth so hard he felt one chip. He knew instantly this wound was more serious than the first. The penetration was deep. The bleeding would be serious, and if his bone wasn't broken, he had the board to thank for that. Before he could regain his senses, the next blow rained down in line with his head, but a few inches too low. Carter lay there trembling, knowing if he took any more punishment he would be in dire condition. His willpower had never been tested so powerfully; to lay there knowing he was bleeding

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profusely, but to know simultaneously that any attempt to tend to the wound could alert his captors was torturous. The next spike went somewhere above his head. He waited nervously for the next strike, but it never came. To his relief, the next sound he heard was the guard's feet descending the metal stairs down from the container. He breathed a heavy sigh of relief.

He let his tensed muscles finally relax as he realized the most dangerous part of the escape was now behind him. Feeling around his mouth with his tongue, he found the chipped tooth and spit it out.
