

Nathan Jackson

Howard Beck

Longing for substance to his life, Nathan Lee Jackson sat on the edge of the northern rim of the Grand Canyon 3 miles west of the main cabins and tourist area. He found himself here haphazardly while programming his Freeform Energy Pod or pod, to travel some place other than the inner cities of The Americas.

Being raised in Inglewood, California, Nathan never quite understood where he fit in. His mother and father were both members of the Inner City Core (ICC), all in tune with the modern technology and brainwashing segments of the fringe elite in charge of The Americas. He wanted something other than what his family and frankly the rest of The Americas were accepting as real life. So, he chose to go to the edge, sitting on the edge of the cliff not afraid of the height or the fear of falling, why should he fear death, his world was pretty much dead in a way. No one was really living anymore, they all just droned around in their fake world of tech and bullshit philosophy.

Standing on the edge overlooking the magnificent scene before him, Nathan let out a sigh of relief after traveling hundreds of miles in the pod over all roads and barriers set up between LA and the North Rim. Having found a little relief finally after all the years of torment he felt in the inner city and the oppression that society was dealing him. He just wanted some time to forget all the bullshit, all the contaminated feelings and struggles of daily life, and hanging out at the edge of the rim was quite satisfying.

He gazed out in the distance at the sunset and shadowing formations from the chasm before him, letting the sunlight soak into his dark skin, the warmth of the sun made him feel warm and fuzzy with all of its complexities of enlightenment that basking in the sun can give you.

Suddenly he felt his footing slip and fear gained his soul, “Whoa”, he silently spoke, the fear of dropping 8000 feet to his death scared him. He wasn’t here to die, but live. Fear subsided and he regained his footing, took a breath and stepped back from the edge of the chasm and noticed in the distance something flying towards him, a drone? fuck, dammit! I can’t get away from anything! He saw the glittering object draw closer to him, the glimmering of the shiny metal reflecting the suns setting light, it was pretty in a way, but also ominous.

Fifteen seconds later the drone was on him, peering into his face, making calculations and sending back information to its internal systems and relaying them back to the home server for confirmation. Nathan slowly back away from the drone and it followed silently in the same pattern and speed as his withdrawal. “Damn you!” Nathan shouted at the drone, “leave me the fuck alone!” The drone sat there at the same level and distance, not moving, not doing anything just peering into his soul. Thirty seconds later the drone backed off and flew quickly away.

Fuck, I fucking can’t get away from anything, this damn society and all of its bullshit. He turned from the canyon edge and slowly walked back to his pod, opened the hatch and climbed in and set the coordinates to his North Rim lodging, the Kaibab Lodge.

Nathan reserved a room while still in LA. His cabin was around to the right of the Main Lodge. The cabins were in pretty bad shape, since they seem to be the original cabins built in the early 20th Century. Grit was scraping under his foot as he walked through the room, he could see outside through the logs that made up the wall. The people next to him could peer into his room as with him theirs. What a shithole, but it's the only place open around this time of year and since his search for remote rural places were few and in between he settled down for the night, but only ONE night.

The next morning upon awaking he noticed that the night had brought snow, not much, but it was different for him, since he was from LA, it never snowed, ever. The weather was different and in a way, pleasing, even though his back was sore from the bed, any kind of pleasantry was rewarding. Nathan grabbed his belongings and placed them in his pod and headed to the Main Lodge for breakfast. The best thing about the place was the Main Lodge, friendly people working the desk and restaurant. All the guests were having breakfast, all six of them. He ordered coffee with eggs and ended up chatting with the couple who shared the next cabin next to him.

They had a life in common, from the inner city looking for something real and coming here was their first get away ever. They liked the rugged style of the cabin, even the cold chill that the night had brought. Nathan finished up his second cup of coffee said his goodbyes to the nice young couple and headed to his pod to again program a new coordinate for his rural adventure.

Jacob Lake was just a few minutes away, Nathan programmed the console on his pod to the north, the pod swiftly drove over the asphalt

road still in existence from the 20th Century. No one was on the road to Jacob Lake as he travelled pass the forest along the way.

Jacob Lake was a tourist's attraction with casino's and carnival rides, created around 2055, Disney Corporation built Jacob Lake into a new Disneyland for the southwest, on their 100th Anniversary. The problem was after a year or two, people stopped coming, so now in 2066, it's a hillbilly haven. All the cowboys and farmers from around the country started setting up camp, even though the authorities were not thrilled having people set up their "trailer parks". Nathan still wanted to see the tourist attraction, which was still open and anyone could visit all year, even in winter, they just enclosed the park with a dome to keep out the weather. The lake itself had dried up decades ago, making a nice open field to create the Disneyland park.

Disneyland, Nathan chuckled to himself, I can't believe I'm going to Disneyland in Arizona. He thought for a moment, heck, I haven't even really been to the one in L.A. that much.

The pod glided to a stop at 67th and 89A, across from the old Blink station. The store was still open and Nathan pulled in a parking spot and went inside to get some snacks. "How's it going," Nathan asked the clerk behind the counter.

"It's going" the older clerk said, "You here to camp or visit the park?" He asked Nathan, eyeballing him up and down, like he was up to no good. " You sure you want to be here?" the man asked. "People like you don't really fit in here, and I don't see many colored people around here."

Nathan looked a little shocked by the stark implications the man was throwing his way. "I don't understand," Nathan said, "People like me? Like you don't have black people come through here?"

"Not really, not since" the man paused to think, "a few years ago, since the last lynching".

Nathan was really shocked by that, "lynching? Are you kidding me?!" Nathan shook his head and couldn't believe that. "I can't believe you had a lynching, it's 2066!"

"Well, you know people, " the clerk said, "they ain't ever gonna change." He scanned the snacks Nathan pulled from the shelf. "If I were you, I'd just keep on going, it's early enough, none of the residents are going to be out and about this morning."

The clerk bagged the groceries and handed them to Nathan. "I'd get while the getting was good." The clerk smiled and nodded to Nathan to head out the door.

"You know, I might just do that," Nathan said, "I really don't want any trouble and I'm just out on a vacation for a while."

Nathan left the store, stashed his items in the back seat and headed west to Bakersfield via St. George and Las Vegas maybe people there would be more friendly. He couldn't believe people still had bigoted feelings towards black people, even now after all these years, heck even after a couple black presidents and yet.

Maybe he should have stayed in L.A. At least he knew where he stood. Out here, he began to wonder if it was safe; even with the Americas drones flying the skies to ward off any potential uprisings. He'd have to

rely on common sense and the government to keep to their word of safety above all else, as their motto stated.

The pods internal lighting system dimmed for Nathan to snooze until his final destination was complete. He jammed a couple of cupcakes and soda in him to stop his hunger and settled back in his seat to sleep for the remainder of his trip.

Five hours later he was awoken by the sound of honky-tonk music, the pod stopped at Hillbilly Harry's Bar and Grill, in Boron, California. Nav systems alerted Nathan his pod needed recharging.

It was early morning around 7:30, the place was closed, but still trashed, music was still blasting but no one had come in to clean up the place or turn off the music. The thing is, it was only Tuesday, and the place looked like Saturday morning or even Sunday morning, the wretched souls who partied every night made their mark today. He was glad they were all gone, fuck knows what would happen if it was still 3am, and the resident party goers were still drunk out of their gourde and perhaps a little unwelcoming, especially to a man of his heritage. He still couldn't believe that in this day and age, but bigotry just can't unwind its ugly head.

Nathan saw a menu on the parking lot gravel and picked it up, glanced at the items and latched on to a drink called the 747, a huge portion of cocktails that'll knock you on your ass. He smiled and thought, what the heck when the place opens at 11am, maybe I'll have one. In the meantime, Denny's was open down the street and he's famished.

Denny's, how many were left? Just a few, scattered across the Americas, still the same menu as the 20th century, all the protein and

other ingredients were replaced with "syns" (synthetic food substances) but for full impact, it all tasted the same as decades before. Maybe it was the seasoning or perhaps they were just implementing some form of hypnosis to make you think it was still the same. It didn't matter to him, he was hungry and it was really the only place around.

11am came and the bar opened, no one was in the place when Nathan walked in and sat at the bar. The bar keep was a young female around 27, blonde, thin, nice looking and came across as fairly intelligent from what he could fathom.

"Tequila, with a Tecate chaser." Nathan said placing his elbows on the bar. He'd have the 747 after catching a buzz, didn't want to drink on a empty stomach, like Denny's had any nutritional value.

"Sure thing." she said. "So, what brings you to these parts?" she asked.

"Vacation, I'm out looking around the Americas".

"You know, these parts are pretty dangerous." she said.

"You know, I'm beginning to believe you."

"Yeah, well, we don't get many people like you here much anymore."

"Yeah, I'm beginning to see that." Nathan said taking a sip of his tequila and sipping his beer.

"You might want to get out of here."

"Yeah, I might." Nathan said drinking the rest of his tequila and chugging his beer.

Just then three mean looking dudes came strutting into the bar. Mean looking dudes, white, rugged, asshole looking for trouble.

"What the fuck is he doing here." One asked the bar keep.

"Hey, he's just leaving."

"Well, he better leave now." The men all gathered around him.

"Dude, I don't want any trouble, I'm just traveling through." Nathan said.

"Well, pay up and get the fuck out, hombre." They said withdrawing from their stance and sitting at a table adjacent to the bar.

"I don't want any problems, I just thought I could have a drink and chill out for a minute before taking off on my journey." Nathan said getting up from his chair and heading for the door.

"Don't let the door hit you on the way out asshole." The rude man said as Nathan left the bar.

Thank God I got out of there alive, Fuck, what a hellhole, what the fuck am I thinking, I should get the fuck out of this part of the country. I really wanted to try that 747, I can't believe the shit I have to put up with, I'd never have this problem in L.A.

I should really go back in there and have it out with those guys, he thought, but then, who was he kidding, they'd beat the shit out of him, but shit, it wasn't fair, especially in this day and age. What the heck was wrong with the world, why was this still happening, wasn't this remedied back in 2040.

Even though he didn't want to he got back into his pod and programmed it for L.A., he'd seen enough of the rural countryside for one lifetime. L.A. may be dead but at least he was still alive to enjoy it.

He sped along the road to the main freeway to the west, but looked in his rearview mirror and saw another pod approaching rapidly.

What the fuck? is that a cop? or are those assholes coming for me? It was the latter. The boys wanted to have some fun. Great...Nathan thought, I should have a gun, but I don't. Maybe I should program my pod to go faster to get to the freeway so I can blend in faster. That was his plan, move faster and get lost.

The pod was gaining more on him, his pod couldn't out maneuver the rapidly approaching pod, he was fucked, so fucked, so mutherfucking fucked he kept shouting in his head.

Shit, what the fuck am I gonna do, what the fuck am I gonna do, he kept repeating to himself. Call the cops! I could call the cops and avoid this catastrophe or would that make it even worst.

He kept punching in his controls to make the pod move faster, it wasn't. Damn, those guys were on my tail now, shit!

Nathan stopped his pod, punched the door open, the gull wings swung open, he hopped out flipped around and waited to confront the three white guys chasing him.

They stopped their pod and got out, and started to walk towards him, looking very angry, spewing obscenities and gesturing for a fight.

Nathan, very afraid and very weary let out a yell, the force of the yell shocked Nathan but also felt good to release such force, the force actually thrust all three assailants into their pod, crushing the pods front and severely injuring all three would be attackers.

Nathan, shocked at this display of force coming from him, was both frightened and pleased at this new force he didn't know he had, jumped back into his pod and took off towards Inglewood on the 5.

Ten minutes later, Nathan looked back in the rear view mirror and didn't see anyone following him, he let out a long breath of relief and settled back in his seat for the three hour ride back to Inglewood.

Never had he encountered such bigotry, such language shed to his skin colour alone, the fear, and the amount of hatred directed towards him, just because of the colour of his skin astonished his sheltered existence in Inglewood, why hadn't his parents taught him of the bigotry that was outside the city, how could they have not told him how white people felt about people of his skin colour.

Was he mad at the perpetrators or at his own parents for not informing him of what lie outside the city of Los Angeles County.

Nathan had a few hours to contemplate his response once he returned to his native land.

The 5 was blocked as soon as he hit the Grapevine near Gorman, the stretch of 5 was deadlocked and snow was starting to fall making the trek home even more slow and difficult. Nathan had the radio on and listening to his fave station online KNAC.com, he liked that the music was soothing and even though it was heavy metal, he felt a warm trust to the beat and sounds, unlike his brother who was still into the heavy beat of hiphop gangsta soft jazz of KONO.com.

The traffic on the 5 was moving inch by inch as Nathan settled back in the pod and had the music turned up to eight in his earplugs, drowning out the sound of the snow and traffic horns blaring around him.

The jam started to let up as he rounded the corner heading to Santa Clarita, and his pod was again moving swiftly through traffic towards L.A.

The pod carved through the streets of L.A. until he entered his parents street and plunged into the garage off the main corridor, the pod came to a stop just inside the garage and opened its gull wings.

“Destination complete.” Pod Voice Rec softly said.

Nathan retrieved his belongings and entered his parents home, empty of family, he placed his belongings in the laundry room for cleaning, and settled into his room and activated his computer.

“Retrieve motion detection video from my pod.” Nathan said to his input speaker.

“Motion Detection Video Acquired.”

“Play Video Sequence 1024AM.”

“Playing Video Sequence 1024AM.”

The video of the encounter with the white bigots played in recorded time.

“Slow motion to half speed.” Nathan commanded.

“Slow to half speed.” Returned the speaker.

The video was slowed and Nathan watched the encounter, the interaction was blurred as he let out his blast of energy that overtook the guys trying to lynch him.

“Slow speed to one quarter.” Nathan requested.

“Slow to one quarter.”

The video was slowed and yet he couldn't make out the video due to the blurriness and pixelation of what was happening on the screen.

Growing frustrated at the video he slammed at the keyboard with his hand, causing a disruption just shy of the encounter with the bigots, except this one destroyed his computer console.

Frustrated, angry and confused, Nathan let out a scream which shattered his bedroom windows.

Nathan, took a deep breath, opened his eyes wide, breathed in another deep breath and held it for a few seconds to deflect his anger.

His anger had built up so much that his containment ability was ceasing and his frustration was building to a unacceptable level, if he continued with this train of thought, he could destroy his house, if not his neighborhood.

Nathan, was frightened about what he was becoming or what he thought he was. Never had he shown these abilities, this rage, this overpowering burst of energy which he couldn't control. Maybe this trek outside the city was the wrong thing to do, maybe he should have just stayed home and lived a nice quiet life like his brother and parents. They weren't angry like him or showed these very aggressive side effects. But what was released was already released and he couldn't put the cat back in the box.

He slowed his breathing, cleaned up his room as he could, picking the keyboard off the floor, returning the console to some sort of normalcy, and cleaning up the shattered glass. Made a call to the glass

replacement store and had their crew deliver and insert the glass window just minutes before his parents and brother arrived from their daily routines.

No one the wiser of the mishap and of his encounters outside the city.

Normacy was achieved, his ability to hide all that happened was pleasing to Nathan so much he settled back into his regular routine with his family, enjoying their Wednesday night pizza gathered around the pool on a warm and cozy Los Angeles evening.

Nathan was still a bit aggro as the dinner continued, his parents were aware of his unsettled state and softly asked how his journey out of L.A. was.

“Oh you know, different.” Nathan confided. “I never knew just how big this country is.” He concluded as he reached for another piece of pizza.

“Well you know son, things are a bit different outside the city, a bit more primitive.” His father said.

“Oh I know that dad.” He returned with a smile as he sipped his cold beer.

“Just let us know if you need help adjusting back to civilization.” His father continued with loving understanding and encouragement for a two way conversation.

“I remember the first time I left the city, I was quite surprised at all the complexities of the outside world.” His father added.

“Oh sure dad, I’d like to discuss that, but not tonight, okay?” Nathan responded, as his brother hit him up side his head with another piece of pizza.

Nathan slapped his brothers hand and watched the pizza slice fall to the padio.

“Fuck off bro!” Nathan jokingly said to his brother.

“Fuck off yourself, bro.” His brother responded. The two wrestled like they always did from childhood. Nathan’s ability to control his anger was becoming increasingly easier to handle as the evening continued and he was happy for that, those angry burst of energy wasn’t what he was use to or enjoyed.

TO BE CONTINUED....WORK IN PROGRESS.