

BLACK WATER JOURNALS



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Black water Journals

Episode 2

Previously in the Black Water Journals:

A bio-mechanical pandemic has infected the planet, contaminating nearly every human being, and converting them into mindless killing machines.

The new race of beings that the disease has spawned are so far indestructible, with no apparent signs of weakness.

In a routine scouting expedition, Sargent Malcolm Jefferies - lead science officer from a human pocket resistance faction - discovered John Melek, a three-hundred-year-old man, buried and in a deep coma, but alive.

Melek had a Mark One ZenTec chip fused to his brain. As the chip had not converted him into a zombified bio mechanical killer, (as was the case with everyone else to have the grave misfortune of having a chip placed in their head) Jefferies pleaded with his commanding officer, Commander Steve Gibson, for permission to try and access his memories.

So far, they have learned that Melek, Chief security officer for ZenTec Industries, was only the second person to have a ZenTec chip placed in his head. After an accident that came close to killing him, Melek had been haunted by disturbing images of Dom Kinser, the former security chief of ZenTec industries, who disappeared under rather mysterious circumstances. Melek's investigations into his visions, led him to an old disused warehouse, where a toxic energy seems to have drained life from both him and the ZenTec chip in his head.

Jefferies and his commanding officer hope that the information contained within John Melek's head can offer some clue as to how the pandemic started and perhaps provide a key to the survival of humanity...

And now, episode two of The Black Water Journals...

Jefferies sat in the control room staring wide eyed at his three-hundred-year-old find, who was lying unconscious in the adjoining room. He glanced at the screen interface and the folder titled 'Black Water Journals' – the file that contained all of John's Memories.

He pinched the space between his eyes and yawned. It had been over twelve hours since he and his commanding officer Commander Gibson had played John Melek's first memory file and in that time, he had not slept, preferring instead to look after his patient.

Commander Gibson entered the room and Jefferies stood up and gave a half-tired salute. Gibson waived it away and told him to sit back down.

"Thought I told you to get some rest Jefferies? Cartrite was supposed to relive you hours ago." The Commander said.

"All due respect sir, Private Cartrite isn't qualified to..."

"Watch a sleeping man?" interrupted the commander. "I give orders for a reason Sargent, and I expect them to be followed. Is that understood?"

Jefferies sighed, looked at John Melek then back to his commanding officer. "Yes sir, sorry sir."

"Well, seeing as you're here you can play the second file in our sleeping guest's memory. After which you can get some sleep yourself!"

"Yes sir."

Jefferies mood picked up a little as his mouse hovered over the icon that read:

File Two – John Melek - The Black Water Journals.

"Well don't stand on ceremony man" the commander said as he sat down next to Jefferies "Let's hear it."

"Yes sir," Jefferies replied, and he clicked on the icon.

As with the first file an audio message played:

You have accessed the ZenTec memory journal of John Melek. Birth date: April five, 2029. Installed and uploaded February nine, 2060 4.32pm GMT.

John Melek. File Two – Initialising.

Jefferies and his commanding officer settled back to listen:

It hurt to open my eyes so much so that I didn't care move my head. Took a while in the dimmed light for the blurred image to come into full focus but staring back down at me as I lay on the tiled floor was a machine.

Not humanoid in shape, in fact more arachnid if I were to assign a familiar frame of reference.

It was a white spherical head, about twice the size of mine, attached to which were eight large pincer-like legs, which I could feel gently moving on either side of my body.

I tried to speak but could not, my feeble utterances were more of a rasping cough.

Every slight movement my head made the machine head followed. It was quite unnerving.

Eventually I resolved to try and get up which the machine did not seem to like. It turned deep red and from the middle of the sphere a pointed metal claw emerged, which if I had continued to raise my head any further would have sunk deep into my right eye.

I slowly laid my head back down and hoped that the machines advance would relent also.

Its colour did return to white. But the pincer stayed perfectly poised.

I held my breath to prevent any slight movement and wondered how long I could go on before I started to convulse through lack of oxygen.

I willed the ZenTec chip in my head to do something.

'Zen, you there?' I thought, not daring to speak the words out loud. 'I could really do with your help right now.'

The machine head and the pincer moved closer.

'Zen!' I yelled in my mind. 'Wake up!'

The pincer moved so close it was practically touching my eye.

'Please Zen, do something!'

My head felt... empty; the area of my brain that had lit up every time Zen talked was somehow dormant.

The pincer began to secrete a murky brown liquid which covered the film of my right iris, quickly followed by a discharge of electricity, so fierce that it sent my entire body into spasm. The mechanical arachnid then jumped back, retracting

its pincer and legs back into its body and landed on the floor like an unassuming metallic ball.

“Give it a minute John.”

The familiar voice came from the other side of the room.

It was closer to fifteen minutes before I could move again but I did. Dazed and nauseous I struggled to my feet. I could only see from my left eye. My right was sealed shut.

The room was bare. Save a few pieces of machinery, and the walls were the same shocking white as the floor which did my headache no favours at all.

“How are you feeling?” came the voice again. I followed the sound.

“Who are you?” I asked, noticing a figure in lying on a bed which had been pressed up against the far wall.

Wires and tubes connected various parts of his head to electronic machinery together with two separate drip feeds.

“And what was that thing?” I asked, carefully stumbling past the metallic sphere to approach the bed.

Whoever it was, his face was burned beyond recognition. Part of the skin on his neck and torso was burned away and replaced by a clear film. It revulsed me to see the internal workings of the man’s throat and chest. His right eye was completely gone, as was part of his nose. His left eye had no eyelid, the man just stared – directly at me. His breathing was laboured, and though he wheezed he did manage to speak.

“You don’t recognise me?”

I Shook my head, but before I could tell the man that I’d had never laid eyes on him, my brain sparked into life. A familiar tingling sensation raced around my head.

“For the record I did suggest we shouldn’t stay here sir. I’m Just fixing your eye now.”

“Zen” I said, “I thought you’d left me!”

I welcomed that feeling, and that voice in my head. More than ever before, Zen’s presence was that of a long-lost friend come home. I opened the lid of my right eye. I could see clearly again. The dizziness and nausea were gone. I felt great!

“I’m detecting another ZenTec chip.” Zen said. “Badly damaged sir, but not so much as its host.”

As I desired to know the identity of the man, Zen’s automatic functions went to work without my even having to request it. Above the man’s head I could see the words:

Dominic Kinser

Deceased

“Dom?” I gasped. “What the hell?”

I didn’t know what to suggest for the best. The man was a dick, but he didn’t deserve this. I reached down to hold his hand. That wasn’t burned at least, but it was cold. Ice cold.

“Got it in one buddy.” He said. “So, you’re the prick that took my job?”

I instinctively laughed then thought better of it.

“What happened?” I asked. “And what’s all this?” I gestured around the room, and the wires attached to his head.

“The chip seems to have taken to you better than it did me.” Dom said, ignoring my questions. “Sorry about your greeting when you woke. The fixer detected a ZenTec chip in need of repair. It was just doing its job. You’re lucky the transition from the upper level didn’t kill you.”

I looked at the metallic sphere. So, that was a fixer I thought. Pity it wasn’t programmed with a bedside manner. It nearly had to fix a mess in my shorts too.

“How did you know about Zen?” I asked.

Dom started to laugh, then his levity was replaced by a coughing fit. I looked around for a glass of water but could find nothing. Dom shook his head gently, knowing what I was looking for.

“My water comes from a drip now.” He said. “So, you’ve named yours Zen?”

I smiled sympathetically and nodded.

“It’s just a piece of tech you know.” Dom said. “Or in my case - the goddam thing that’s keeps me in perpetual pain.”

“Why are you registered as...”

“Deceased?” Dom finished.

I nodded.

“Because I am.” He replied. “Take away these machines and fixerbots in my bloodstream and there’s not much left that’s human. Inferno’s come home to roost.”

I must have looked confused because he clarified:

“Just a book my mother used to have. She liked her novels.”

I’d never heard him talk about his family or anything remotely sentimental before. He’s had time to face his vulnerability and consider his life choices here I suppose. “What is this place?” I asked, changing the subject.

“One of Andrea Scebane’s many hideaways,” he said with a rising level of disdain. “I was her security chief. Now I’m... a lab rat.”

“What does she want with you?” I asked.

“I wish I knew,” he answered “She probably wants the same with you too. Though you’re next generation. I feel like the first failure in a production line.” He paused to clear his throat. I saw phlegm sliding down his oesophagus through the clear plastic film. “At least she didn’t turn you into a reject from the family Barbeque.”

“She did this to you?” I asked.

“The fixer did this.” He said. “The chip didn’t bond with me quite as well as it has for you. Dr. Scebane thought she could correct the problem by letting the fixer burn me to a crisp. So, then I died, and the chip in my head brought me back to life, well in a manner of speaking. Dr. Scebane’s still working on me.”

“To fix you?” I asked.

“I don’t think so,” Dom said. “when she’s here she never bothers speaking to me to see if I’m ok. She communicates with the chip in my head, adjusts the instruments, leaves me screaming in pain, then grunts and leaves.”

“Then we need to get you out of here” I said.

“That wouldn’t be wise” Zen interrupted. “The ZenTec chip in his head is severely damaged. If you disconnect him from the life support machine, then...”

“Yes, the words ‘life support’ give it away thanks Zen” I said. “Is there no way we could move the instrumentation and wires?”

Dom smiled - at least I think it was a smile, his charred excuse for lips seemed to move in an upward direction – He was clearly enjoying the interplay between me and the voice in my head.

“Mine never does that” he finally said. “All I get are read outs and some code that causes one hell of a headache whenever I try to make sense of it. Gets stronger every time our good doctor comes to visit.”

“We need get out of here Dom” I said, looking around for an exit. “Where’s the door?”

“There’s no door” he said “We’re thirty feet below ground here. No entrances, no exits.”

“Then how the hell did we end up here?” I said.

“Some sort of matter transfer.” He answered. “Dr. Scebane transported me here. I have no idea how **you** managed it.”

I am as much a fan of the Vintage Trek Reels as anyone but found it hard to believe I was ‘beamed’ here. Even more, that I beamed myself here!

“It’s like your molecules are broken apart up there and rearranged in this room.” Dom continued.

“Mr Kinser is quite correct,” added Zen.” Before I was temporarily disabled sir, I managed to lock on to a type seven energy signature, which was emanating from this room. It became a pathway between the two environments.”

“Can we use it to get out of here?” I said.

“We can sir,” said Zen “And I strongly advise it. Having been upgraded by the fixerbots, the journey should be relatively painless.”

“What about him?” I asked pointing at Dom.

“Nothing you can do for me buddy. I’m not going anywhere.” Dom said.

“That’s enough from you.” I said. “You don’t get a vote. You can thank me later.”

“Sorry, I can’t” he said, “Even if I did survive the trip, my daughter’s survival is hinged upon my cooperation.”

“What are you talking about?” I said.

“She doesn’t live with me.” He said, “Dr Scebane has made my obedience a condition of her survival.”

He looked away and in a softer tone said: “Which is why I had to inform her of your arrival the moment you transported down here. I’ve just been keeping you talking till she arrived. I’m so sorry John.”

“Family can be such a great bargaining tool can’t it?”

The voice came from behind me. I slowly turned to see Dr Scebane staring right at me. She sighed and shook her head.

“So, what are we going to do about this?” she said, slow and considered.

“Well first you can let him go and then I have some questions, or would you prefer I speak to the authorities?” I snapped back.

“I wasn’t talking to you.” She calmly replied. “I was talking about you.”

She tilted her head to one side and smiled sympathetically. I was beginning to feel like a dog who was about to be euthanised by his regretful owner.

“Loyal employees are so hard to find. Such a shame,” She said. “Do sit down.”

Without any conscious thought, I suddenly sent myself crashing down onto the floor. The doctor’s command seemed to instil in me, a deep desire to obey. I felt a sharp stabbing pain in my head.

“The ZenTec chip I placed in your head was never yours.” She said.

I tried to speak. My mouth moved but no sound came out. The Doctor proffered a seditious smile.

“That is still my property. And, since it has seen fit to malfunction and fuse itself to your brain then you too are mine.”

All I could do was shake my head in objection and even that slight movement caused a terrible amount of pain.

“Which is why I regret what I must now do.” She said.

I tried with all my might to get up, but it was as though my mind and body were partially disconnected. She was taking over. I was becoming a passenger in my own body. I still felt pain and fear but was powerless to do anything about it.

“I’m still here sir.” Zen said. “The doctor has overridden part of my control matrix.”

“Then fight it!” I internally yelled.

“That is not easy sir.” Zen replied.

“I didn’t ask!” I replied.

“You see, the gift I’m going to impart upon this pitiful planet,” the doctor continued “is sublime. We will be as the Gods of old.”

The pain left my body, or at least the nerve sensations were no longer delivering those messages to my brain. I tried to move my arms, but it seemed to my senses as though I no longer had any limbs.

“And I’m afraid rogue elements such as you Mr Melek, can’t be permitted to continue.”

“Zen” I thought “Please help me.”

The doctor cleared her throat and spoke slowly and clearly: “ZenTec login, voice ident Dr Scebane, passcode alpha one zero beta nine. Stand by.”

My mouth moved and my voice returned – except, it wasn’t mine it was Zen:

“Standing by Dr Scebane.” He said.

The Doctor nodded. “Host destruct and detachment in one minute.” She said.

She’s forcing Zen to kill me! I thought.

“Zen!” I yelled internally.

“I’m sorry sir” came the reply “Countdown to host-destruct commencing...”