

*The Object*  
By Patrick Villegas

“I’ll see you later.” The woman, Trish, winked, her green eyes mesmerizing as always, as she walked out of the tiny office and the reinforced walls closed behind her.

“..goodbye...” David heard the last of her footsteps echo through the outside chambers, and then he was alone. Before he could ask her out for dinner, his throat had suddenly parched, to the point where all he could do was nod. After two weeks of working together, he still couldn’t ask her out on a date. A fool amongst fools, he thought. David sighed to himself, swiveled in his chair, and turned to face the bulletproof glass.

“Well,” David says, “It’s nice to see you too old friend.” In the adjacent room, The Object merely pulsed a glowing blue, as it had always done. The Object, of course, had no capacity to communicate in any meaningful way. It hadn’t had the ability to when it was discovered crash-landed in a local *Los Lobos Mexicanos* fast food restaurant back in ‘02, and it couldn’t do it now. David did not know what he expected from The Object. All he knew was that this job would eventually pay his college loans, and if all he had to do was stare at a rock for a few hours each day, he’d do it.

David sat down in his chair as the humming of the machines numbed his brain. He remembered overhearing something about “test” starting today (some of his coworkers just couldn’t control their voices), but he couldn’t have cared less. It was something his superiors would take care of. Instead, his thoughts mindlessly drifted towards his education. David reminded himself to not let his efforts go to waste. This job was meant for a deadbeat, and he wasn’t that. This was merely a stepping stone on his path to greatness. He glanced passively at his watch. Not even five minutes had passed. David groaned.

He pulled out his journal and pencil and logged into the lab computer. He opened up today’s log and quickly skimmed what the woman had written down. Nothing important or unusual, as always. At this point, David merely went to a previous log, copied his old memo (“Nothing of significance to report. Specimen #24016 is stationary, pulsing blue once every ~15 minutes.”) and pasted it into every slot of his twelve-hour shift. With his harsh, backbreaking work done for the day, David propped his feet on the table, opened his notebook, and started sketching. He had picked it up as a hobby, a way to kill time since phones weren’t allowed. He’d gotten better, but he was still far from competent. David wanted to

impress the woman, and figured a proficiency in drawing would possibly help break the ice.

He peaked over to look at The Object. It stayed hovering on its steel pedestal, the blindingly white walls contrasting against it. David had only heard stories about what the rock was capable of. Stuff overheard during a conversation or two. Apparently, when the company first found it, it was nothing more than a meteor. Then someone decided to touch it. Next thing you know, the poor sucker, a Private PJ Hansel, was completely and utterly vaporized. Poofed into nothing. A body was never found, and when Mr. Hansel's family started asking questions, they were "taken care of discreetly."

After the "PJ Incident", The Object became what it is today. A colossal, humming lump of rubbish. Back-ups have attempted to re-enact the situation, most against their will, but these efforts were all for naught. Whatever had happened to PJ, it just wasn't possible anymore. And it would never happen again, at least not in David's lifetime. He refused to believe differently.

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Six and a half hours. Six and a half hours in and David's suspicions were still, as always, correct. Nothing. Just like his first day. Just like his last day. By that time he had finally finished the drawing he was working on. It swirled constantly, a black hole of sorts. It was filled with nothing but vortexes and dots, like an empty abyss reflecting the shadows of nothing. David looked onwards, perplexed by his own work. He stared long and hard and started to make something out of it. A portrait of a face. Hundreds of them actually, of the same exact person, all from different angles and perspectives. They are of a man, middle-aged yet handsome, someone in his mid-thirties, with a buzz cut and a non-threatening smile. David doesn't know who this person is.

Suddenly a blaring siren rings through David's ears. The lights shut off and in the distance, David hears banging. Gunshots. David instinctively cowers to hide underneath his desk. He begins shivering in the darkness, praying silently for the emergency power reserves to turn on. He does not want to think about what is going on, about his coworkers screaming outside the metal doors, begging for their lives as their silenced by the sound of automatic gunfire. He does not want to die here, in a place that does not care for him. The room turns red as the emergency power finally kicks in. The lights paint David three shades darker as The Object pulses faster.

He hears voices again and suddenly the northern wall of the room explodes. David grabs the wheels of his chair, holding it in front of him to avoid being seen.

It does not work, as the invaders shout at him in a strange foreign language. They wear bulletproof armor and carry two-handed rifles, gas masks granting them anonymity. All except for one. Her hair is tied up and she still wears her lab coat as she gives a knowing nod to her compatriots. The woman smiles her beautiful smile, her emerald green eyes, once filled with beauty, are now cold and indifferent. She points a pistol at him, and as David gets up from behind his hiding place this is the first time David sees his crush as anything other than beautiful. David feels every bead of sweat on his skin, as The Object pulses faster.

David feels the barrel of the gun trained on him. She shouts more orders at him and smacks him across the face with the back of her pistol. She shoves him into the room, and as the doors hiss shut behind him, David shakily walks his way towards The Object. It begins to pulsate, humming with energy. The girl and her men stand behind the glass case, her ever incandescent smile adorning her face as the doors close behind him. David stands in front of it now. He wants to be tough, to be valiant, but he can't help the tears rolling down his cheeks. He raises his left hand to The Object, and as he nervously brings himself up to touch it, he tries to yank away, a natural instinct telling him to stop. But it is too late, as a transparent hand suddenly reaches out for him. David tries to scream, but he feels his body being yanked into The Object, as a bright white light fills the room, blinding David as he is brought into nothing.

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Trish sighs as the lights go back to normal and her professional persona comes back to her. There is no sign of David anywhere. Her colleagues take off their masks, congratulating each other about the success of the trial. Extreme stress. That's what was needed in order to finally power Specimen #24016. After so many years and millions of dollars blown on nothing, the organization was desperate enough to try anything. Since David had been half-assing his reports, he was the most likely candidate for experimentation. Better him than her, Trish thought.

She was still in a panic that something had actually happened, yet Trish still tried to stay relatively composed, her face emotionless. The hypothesis was only really half-assed. It was too bad David had to be the one to go. He seemed nice.

Her coworkers congratulated her, patting her on the back for her performance. They raced each other to go see the footage they had, of course, prepared and recorded. She was about to follow them out when she saw a journal lying on the floor. As she picked it up, it occurred to her that this was probably David's. It was filled with different sketches and drawings: the lab, Specimen #24016, her... Trish felt disgusted for a moment, but hated to admit that the art did steadily became better and better. A shame, she thought. She flipped through, pausing on the last page, perplexed. She couldn't understand why his last piece

would be so many drawings of a stranger's face and his own, both smiling, eyes piercing into her soul.