

[1]: The Artifact

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The same sense of foreboding and dread that filled us all the last time an artefact such as this had been found, seemed intensified by the size of this new object. Perhaps it was the presence it had, but perhaps that formidable period of our history, that is best forgotten, had somehow gotten into us despite generations of social reservation and hush.

The artefact was spherical, a significant departure from the cube that had been discovered before. It was quite clear, right from the miserable discovery of it, that this was the next level in what our previous generations had gone to war over, had died in the hundreds of thousands for and had buried in pure glass, hundreds of meters into solid granite, never to see sunlight again.

Records of the first remained of course, we are not yet that barbaric that we would let future generations face the same issues unprepared. What could those discoverers do, what could the survivors do, other than to note it down, prepare the new generations but prevent the artefact from becoming a draining, social soul ripping, generations feared force, entirely separate to the artefact's own power. No, they wouldn't give that period of history the benefit of continued horror upon the surviving population.

The new object, black, matt, solid and visually dense, sat at the bottom of the crater it had manufactured for itself after the first scientist had touched it. Its surface accurate to multiple decimal places of pi, its density sufficient to pressurise the carbonised material it sat upon to rough, scorched diamond.

The heat the artefact produced had killed all those in the near area, its simple but efficient killing of those discovering scientists, had stunned and horrified those waiting to prepare themselves and the population for the strife, feared and loathed for so many generations.

The artefact hummed, not with an ear piercing single-tone as the first had, but with a low pitched whine that chilled all those watching to their core. It was the pure embodiment of the heat they knew it was generating, the death it had inflicted. Pure embodiment of their own horror, their own demise. Its penetrating, yet perfect, tone felt like the crushing of bone under the pressure of ones own muscles, straining to get away. They knew they would suffer worse losses than their ancestors had. The discovery of the artefact, that heat, that tone, the death would only serve to squash all hope from them. Their world would end with this. Perhaps not immediately, for the first artefact had waited to do its killing. But they knew. There was no use running, not this time.

The artefact sat there, on its hot, diamond plinth. The pressure at the point of contact was visible as a single star like burst within the wider diamond plinth. The surrounding air had no easily combustible compounds left. The oxygen had readily burned with that initial killing strike. Oxides, Nitrides and Sulphides littered the crater. A harsh wind blew towards the artefact, its own heat sufficient to scorch the earth for an area significantly larger than the artefact's own initial volley of death.

We, the public, knew they discussed it, but the anger we all felt, was purely a frustration born from a lack of human ingenuity. The first artefact, the government knew, had made serious inroads into the extermination of society. How then could they hope, or dare to presume, they would have any preventative impact in the face of this. Their scientists had calculated the mass of the new artefact. It was a factor of millions of times that of the first artefact, and therefore millions of times the potency of death. There could be no mistake, if its idle heat could burn the very air, any first strike would be miniscule in comparison to the world-ending power it could deliver.

They waited... It waited...

The government couldn't recall how long this interval had lasted; the very look of the object had chilled them into a numb state. A state of quiet fear, of hearts in unadulterated arrhythmia.

They shared glances, eyes unable to water, their public unable to breath, as the news came.

It was time...

The End....