

The Man of Theodore

Canon Hagel
caphagel@gmail.com

The house smelled like cinnamon and sweets. There were paper snowflakes hung up on the windows, plastic reindeer in the front lawn with a layer of snow resting on top of them. Images of a fat jolly man with a red coat, a long white beard were plastered on everything, from plates, plastic drinking cups, decorations and so on. It was the happiest day of the year for most; it was Christmas. The house was alive, there were warm yellow lights shining upon the living room and kitchen, there was torn wrapping paper around the christmas tree from already opened gifts. With 3 small boys running around, playing whatever game they spontaneously agreed on, any adult would surely get a stroke trying to keep up with the boys, though all of the adults were talking to one another and drinking their red wine. On the couch in the living room sat two of the mothers of the boys, the third mother off in the kitchen talking to one of the other husbands about little league basketball.

“so, how did James like his gift? Did I get the right size?” Leela asked in a quiet tone, trying to avoid any chances of eavesdropping that the small boys might make.

“Oh he really liked the shoes you picked out; he was really concerned about not having good footwear for when basketball season starts back up,” Shelly responded back. She glanced over to a pile of other toys that James had received for Christmas, though he didn’t play with. Leela also noticed the disregarded pile of toys and gifts that James had created, seeing the shoes that she just bought him there made her feel a slight sense of annoyance.

“Leela, don’t worry about James...” Shelly quickly mentions, seeing Leela’s reaction to her gift. “James has always, eh-h- he just squeezes the most amount of fun or value or what have you out of anything he gets then forgets about them. Your gift was great! Though just, don’t feel too bad. I am happy that he is only like that to objects and not his friends or family” Shelly lightly chuckles in a friendly tone, trying to make Leela feel less bad.

“It’s fine, it’s fine. I just really hate Christmas for this exact reason; feels like everyone is judging what gifts you give someone. No one wants socks or whatever, too weird if you give them something really expensive like a huge lego set.” Leela replies

“Do you think my gift to Ron was good? He didn’t seem like he cared much about it-” Shelly asks, the three kids running around the couch in a strange form of tag, yelling and laughing their lungs out. Leela

Aug 2026
Vol 10. No 1.

waits and watches the kids run off to a different part of the house for their games before the two continue their conversation. “for sure! Shelly I think the 3DS was one of the best gifts he got. I had to basically pry it from his hands after he figured out how it worked. He’s a little hesitant to figure something out, though once he does figure out how something works he can’t stop playing with it.”

Now nineteen years goes by for those three kids, they go through elementary school, middle school, and high school together. Each one of their parents are still friends to this day, always insisting that Ron and James would go hang and hangout since, in their world the two boys have been friends since they were no older than toddlers; though the sad truth is that James and Ron never really cared much about each other. As they were growing up James just seemed to become less interested in Ron, which overtime Ron accepted that fact and stopped trying to be friends with them. They became total opposites of each other.

James ever since getting accepted into a nearby college, would spend his time drinking at frat parties, spending 4+ hours at his local gym... and then spend the weekend at another frat party, The friends were plenty, the drinks poured, the drugs ensued, and the nights were unforgettable. Each party was an overwhelming sensation to his senses in every way possible, each night they would play a new form of music, each night new people from other frats or sororities would show up, new drinks, new games, new dares, new mistakes; and James was all about that life.

However Ron never much was someone for parties, unless it was a birthday party of a close friend or family. His idea of a perfect night would be having all of his homework done on whatever class he was apart in, and playing videogames until the sunlight of tomorrow crept into his window. While he did have a wide range of games he’d like to play, he found that playing player vs player games with a small group of close friends to be his favorite form of pass time. He spent an ungodly amount of hours memorizing every statistic, item, ability in that game and was able to enjoy it for its entirety. Ron was as clean as a whistle, even at the age of 20 he still rejected trying any alcohol or drugs offered to him by any source. While James was obviously the more sociable one, Ron truly did his homework in his classes and tried to actually learn something new.

One could argue with the parents for always trying to get these two to hangout or do something with each other, though in reality they couldn’t have been more different, they are like two different puzzle pieces that didn’t connect. The only reason why these two would even be next to each other was because of a man named *Theodore*. He has been with these two for as long as he could remember; and he loved them like brothers.

You see, Theodore was a real wildcard, which was perfect for someone like James. After classes in high school they’d shoot hoops at the court or go to the gym, they’d go on a hike, shooting range, bike ride, shoplift, concert, rave, drink. Anything that James wanted to do Theodore was already getting ready for it. Theodore never cared much for the activities they’d do, he enjoyed the time spent with his friends the most. Where James would drunkenly harass people after a hard night partying, Theodore would be a little bit more sober and apologise to the strangers on his behalf. Where James would shoplift candy or soda at

a grocery store, Theodore would secretly pay up front for both of the items that they “stole”.

But even Theodore had his limits with James, when 3 nights of hard partying caught up with him; he’d turn to Ron. He would often find himself playing co-op games with Ron while suffering a hard hangover. While sick he would call Ron and suggest movies to watch online, new game releases, studying for an upcoming surprise exam in the math class they both shared. While James and Theodore both truly enjoyed the thrill of life, Theodore could enjoy the quieter joys of life too, which was something that James would fight tooth and nail to not be a part of.

Now it was these three that their parents saw clear as day, “the iconic trio” like they would always mention. There were a lot of times where the three of them would go out and do something small, like go to the mall, go get food, or watch a movie at the very most. The adults would either hear about their hangouts or see photos that James would post to his Instagram, and their assumption of those two being friends were only reinforced.

At face value, You could say that Theodore had zero personality if he just did everything else his friends did; which would be a fair point. Theodore was terrified of conflict, and had zero desire to fight with his closest friends in any regard over anything. But, where we pick up on these three is right before an overall insignificant, but meaningful day for Theodore. This trip with his friends was a long day coming. If you asked Theodore what he’d value most, he’d answer without hesitation his friends and family. Though, the Ocean would be a close second.

The sharp smell of a pungent, ammonia scent hit James nostrils jolting him awake, his head killing him from last night’s partying. Two of his roommates stare and burst out into laughter, recording James reaction to the smelling salts.

“AH! Goddamn! What the hell do you two idiots want?” James responds with a strong tone of annoyance at the two. In a groggy state he brushes the cans of Coors light and crumbs off of his chest and onto the floor.

“Get up you damn bum, it’s 12pm. You got two people outside wanting you.” the frat brother with the camera states, having to stop mid sentence to let out the rest of his laughter.

With a confused look, James looks outside his window; seeing a brown minivan out front of the frat house honking in random intervals, seemingly trying to get ahold of someone. Seeing the minivan put a big smile on James face. Anyone else that would take a look at this vehicle would quickly write off the vehicle owner’s questionable taste in cars, but to James, that brown minivan was full of memories, and simply iconic.

The two frat brothers started to depart the living room where James was sleeping, as James got up from his very comfortable couch to gather the state of his surroundings, he could smell the odor of sweat and alcohol throughout the house, and could already see the damages from last night's party on the walls and other furniture, though that is tomorrow's problem he has two people waiting on him out front of the house. James quickly rushed throughout the rest of the beat up home, gathering his phone and wallet and sprinting outside.

"I'm here, I'm here! Quit that honking Theo! You are going to wake up this entire neighborhood!" James hollers at Theodore with a playful tone.

"No one is sleeping James! It's already the afternoon dude, you were supposed to be awake and ready by now, you are not going to bring any swimming gear?" Theodore asks back, noticing that James only is bringing his shorts and his old "I <3 NYC" t-shirt.

James laughs while quickly getting into the front seat. "Eh it's just water, it's not gonna kill me. Where are our surf boards?" James takes a look around the Minivan, he notices Ron sitting quietly in the back seat absently looking out the window, James gives him a silent nod to at least acknowledge him before finishing up his 5 second investigation of where the surf boards were.

"Did you not read my message? I have a spot that my friend is holding onto them down at the coast, he has wet suits down there too so we don't freeze to death in the water" Theodore asks with a bit of a playful tease in his voice. He starts up the car's engine and begins their drive to the beach.

"Last night errrr- I wasn't exactly prioritizing my phone" he sheepishly replies, at this point Theodore could smell the alcohol on his breath.

"He sent the message a week ago" Ron quietly chimes in, trying to join into the conversation.

"Okay okay, I get it, it's fine we are on the road, lets just shut up about me and lets start talking about who's gonna eat the most shit trying to surf!" James laughs loudly, hitting the shoulder of Theodore with the side of his hand, poking fun at his past surfing attempts that he posted online.

"Ohhhh no no no! Listen I might've had some hard falls in my past but I have infinitely more experience surfing than you! You've never even surfed James." Theodore laughed, keeping the energy in the car high. The minivan now starts to get onto the highway, the rusted car struggles to accelerate up to speed compared with the rest of the newer, nicer vehicles but does in time. The view of the weather was something quite breathtaking, half clear blue skies directly behind them, and dark thunderous clouds in front.

"I checked the weather today and it was supposed to be clear, I have no idea where this shitty weather came from" Ron states, adjusting himself in the back of the car to see through the windshield at what

mother nature had to offer.

“I mean, it looks pretty nice! There are some god rays over to the left of us.” Theodore chimes in, not trying to let the weather ruin his special day with his friends.

The three of them stare at the weather in silence for a bit, the sun right behind the dark rain clouds which refracted the light to make one remarkable sight. Ron pulls out his phone to try and take a picture of the sight though it was blocked mainly by Theodore blocking the cool rays.

“Hey James, can you take a picture of the weather with my phone? I can’t see it very well being in the back seat since its off more to our front” Ron asks quietly, offering his phone already on the camera app to James. The car passed the point where the rain started, and it started very hard. Large droplets hitting the windshield with hundreds of taps. The sensor to the car already puts the windshield whippers at its most rapid pace.

James, with a smirk for his next bit, grabs Ron’s phone. He angles the phone to get the best view of the golden rays of the sun piercing the near black color clouds. Suddenly he lunges over to his left, almost laying himself directly in front of the steering wheel. James arms nearly out of the car’s window on Theodore’s side. “Oh, the photos are great! Right here! I should be a photographer!”

Theodore's heart sinks and tries to push James back over to his side, shoulder digging into James side as he tries his best to regain control over the vehicle. “James what the fuck get out of the way!” he protests, the car starting to veer to the left side of the highway. The car behind them honks loudly seeing them merge into the left lane without any use of the blinker. Ron sits still in the back of the car, watching the road through the front windshield and seeing the car turn nearly off of the road. Ron wanted to do, wanted to say a thousand things in that moment to try and help though, they only remained thoughts. His body frozen...just staring watching them veer off of the road. Theodore after a few seconds of struggle pushes with all of his might with both of his hands to get James out of the way. Theodore death grips the steering wheel, seeing them at this point entirely off of the asphalt. He sharply turns the car to the right though overcorrects, the car jumps and rattles as it transfers from grass to asphalt. Theodore starts to correct his mistake, but once again overcorrects, the tires start to lose friction with the ground as the heavy downpour of rain makes the car hydroplane.

“Shit shit shit!” Theodore exclaims. The brakes start to strengthen now but do nothing with the hydroplaning, the brown minivan steering hard into the left once again and quickly jumps off of the asphalt. The metal fence separating the two lanes of traffic on the highway snags and bursts open from the force of the out of control van. Ron still sits in the back seat, eyes wide watching the danger of the situation sky rocket with each passing moment, though all three of their faces and the interior of the car lit up from a bright light in front of them, rapidly growing brighter until it nearly blinded everyone in that car. The light now was too bright, Ron having to squint to avoid the source of the light.

Ron slowly opens his eyes, the sharp smell of chemicals fills his senses and his eyes are greeted with a white interior room. He sees machines hooked up to his arm, pumping god knows what into his arm. He also sees that he is laying down on a medical bed, and just then he puts it together that he is in a hospital. "Hello?" Ron asks out quietly, his voice echoing in the empty room. As he looks around, he finds a red button with the label "ASSISTANCE" in arms reach. He presses the button and waits for a few moments. A lady with blue clothing and long brown hair walks.

"Hey, you're awake. Can you hear me all right? Can you tell me your name? Or do you know what happened?" She asks, sitting down on the side of the bed. She pulls out a small flashlight to check his eyes.

"Yes I can," Ron quietly replies. "My name is Ron Davidson. I don't know what happened, we were uh...in the car and we lost control. I don't remember anything after that." One thousand questions racing through his mind, but once again he isn't able to ask just one.

"Correct, you were a part of a car accident. Besides being knocked out for a few hours you seem to be fine." she says, with a calm but urgent tone. We will notify your parents that you are awake and well."

Ron began to sweat, frantically looking around the room; the whole gravity starting to press down on him. His chest felt like there were 19 tons on top of it. One thousand questions were racing through his mind, but was only able to mutter one question. "Is everyone alright?" he asks in a quiet tone, almost not wanting to ask from fear of the answer.

The nurse visibility mentally prepares herself to answer whatever questions Ron has to ask. She lets out a quiet sigh, not out of annoyance but, because this part of the job was always the hardest. "I'll, uhm...get the doctor." she says. Her serious tone leaves her voice, being replaced by one of troubled thoughts. She gets up and walks out of the room, not being able to look Ron again directly in the eyes before she leaves. Ron felt like his heart was already far, far down in the ground. But the way the nurse reacted made it feel like it was in earth's core. Moments feel like an eternity, as five minutes later passes and a doctor walks into the room, wearing a purple shirt which could only be described as a white lab coat on top of it.

"Hey, Ron. My name is doctor Latin. How are you feeling since you've woken up?" he asks with a warm voice, pulling a chair to the right side of his bed to sit on.

"Is everyone okay." he asks once again, the quietness of his tone starting to leave. He didn't care about anything else, but he needed to see if people were hurt or not.

Dr Latin quietly sighs, seemingly just like the nurse was just with Ron. "I see, straight to the point. Well, the car that you guys crashed into was one of those new 2035 Cybercars. I am not much of a car guy but those things are just one hunk of steel, hardly any crumple zones. The man that was driving did not suffer more than a fractured rib that his seatbelt caused once you guys hit him."

“What about Theodore, or James?!” Ron now demanded, tired of people avoiding what he really wanted to know.

Dr Latin looks down slightly at the floor, preparing for what he had to say. “I understand. James, the one that was sitting in the passenger seat. He is currently awake and his parents are already here. He’s a little scratched up though should be discharged out of the hospital very soon”

Ron’s heart rises a bit hearing the doctor’s words, though he is still waiting on one last name, Theodore.

“For, Theodore,” there was a pause in the doctor’s speech. “His side of the car sustained the most of the force from the impact, Theodore passed away about four hours ago in the hospital.”

And those very words rattled inside Ron’s mind for the rest of the month.

The sharp smell of a pungent, ammonia scent hit James’ nostrils jolting him awake. His head killed him from last night’s drinking. James instantly recognizes the smell of the salts, and could already tell who was behind this prank, his eyes adjusting to the light from the sun”

“Troy, I swear to god leave me al-” James gets cut off by Troy.

“No no, It’s been a month and you’ve been drinking your life away. Clean up this damn room and check your phone once in a while, it was going off like crazy last night.” Troy starts to walk out the living room, a few frat brothers of James giving him a dirty look as they continue throughout their business in the house, James spiraling into near alcoholism was a depressing sight, he hasn’t even been partying or going to chapter with the rest of them. James looks around at the brothers entering and passing through the house, disregarding their stares or comments. He opens up his phone and reads nearly 20 missed calls from his mother, frantically he gets onto his contacts app and calls his mother, could this be an emergency? Finally his mother answers.

“James??” His mother asks, with a strong tone of desperation.

“Hello? Yes mom? What is going on, I didn’t have my phone on me last night, I am sorry for not answering you.” James replies, trying to comfort his mother with whatever she is frantic about.

“James listened to me, Theodore’s parents did the rebuild program. Theodore is coming over to the house right now!” She cries.

James hearing these words made his breath quicken, his view sharpening and unfocusing at the same time. The man that he cried his eyes out over his passing for weeks is about to be over to his house.

“What? What do you mean? What the hell is the rebuilding program??” James asks frantically, his tone the same as his mother.

“I, I don’t know. Debby called me and explained what was going on. Apparently it’s like some sort of program where they collect data and neurons or some sciencey mambo jumbo and make you into a robot. I haven’t seen what Theodore looks like, I tried telling Debby that we needed to tell you and Ron at a specific time because you two are grieving!” She explains.

“So what do you want me to do about this? I am honestly speechless” James says. A few people at the frat house stop what they are doing, curious to what is getting James so stressed.

“I don’t know, honey. I suppose you go do whatever you did with Theodore beforehand. Me and dad are about to drive over to Theodore’s parents to ask what is going on in person, James please hang in there okay?” She states, her tone still frantic but with a sense of motherly comfort.

“Alright, I’ll call you if I need anything mom. Love you.” James quietly said, noticing the small group of people hovering around the entrance of the room to eavesdrop. He turns to the brothers.

“Can a dude get some privacy around here?” James announces. The crowd quickly dispersed back to whatever business they were doing.

James lets out a loud, overdue sigh as he plants himself back onto the couch. His mind is racing faster than the speed of light. What do you even ask your once dead friend? What does Theodore think of him? Isn’t the rebuild program for rich people, how can his parents afford something like this? Is he going to look human, or look like an actual machine? Many thoughts paced through his mind like a race horse. He sits there on the brown couch, in the living room where dozens of frat brothers pass him, doing random tasks and chores to prepare for the party later that night.

The morning quickly turns to mid afternoon, but you wouldn’t be able to tell at a glance. Large grey clouds cover the sky, leaving absolutely zero blue sky to be seen. James is still there on the brown couch, his head in his hands thinking...just...thinking...

There was a knock on the door. James almost forgot the whole reason why he was overthinking, confused for a moment why anyone would be knocking on the door, James quickly remembers the conversation that he and his mother had earlier that morning. James slowly got up, walking out of the living room to the door. He looked once last time outside the window to see if there was that iconic brown van to signify that this was really Theodore, though he remembers that day, perhaps a little too vividly in that moment. His heart weighs heavier at the seconds past, continuing to the front door. He places one hand on the handle of the door, some part of him hoping that whoever is behind the door isn’t Theodore. James twists the handle and opens the door.

James opens the front door, revealing what now remains of Theodore. The robot was shorter than he expected, about only 5’3. The new body of Theodore was a strange mix of metal and clothes, his head had

the shape of an oval on its side, the front of what you'd even call his "face" just being one large lens like you would see on a camera, it flicked, adjusting to get James in focus. There was a long moment of silence between the two, James just staring at what "Theodore" had become, and Theodore stood there silently, waiting for James to respond. Both of them had lots of questions to ask each other, though none of them were ready to even speak.

The moments slowly collected between the two, collected so much that they might've been there just silently staring at each other for almost a minute. James nearly had the courage to utter something, though how do you even respond to something like this? "Hey Theo" James quietly said, still observing the physical appearance of Theodore, his robotic lens head connected to his body by a thin, but sturdy piece of metal that was his "neck", it was covered in wires and cables traveling from his head to Theodore's thorax. Despite how morally jarring this whole situation was, Theodore had a blue flannel on with a pair of dark blue jeans, something that he would naturally wear. His arms were surprisingly thin, a few hydraulics acting the majority of the mass making up his arms. Theodore's hands were like scoops almost, something you'd see out of the movie *Wall-E*, one palm with three "fingers" that can retract into a central shape like a spoon. James couldn't tell if that was just artistic design or meant for some other purpose.

"What's up, James" Theodore replied, James surprised that his voice actually sounded almost identical to what his original voice sounded like, although there was an ever so slight hint of static. "Can I come inside?" he asks, families and a few frat brothers across the street staring at the robot. Ever since the development of the rebuild program beginning during the very end of the 2020s, these "rebuilt" people were extremely rare to come across. Only a few, extremely wealthy families across the globe proudly displayed their loved ones, rebuilt in metal and plastic glory. But what confused James was the fact that the ones that he saw from wealthy families were almost exactly human-like, with very little robot to show. He supposed that the more someone looked like a robot, the more affordable it was, He never took Theodore's family as rich, considering that they made their 24 year old son drive a rusty minivan.

"Oh, uhm sure." James replied. The urge to drink from a beer can started to grow the more he looked at Theodore. "Let's go to the backyard, not a lot of people walking there." James said. The two start making their way through the frat house to the backyard, getting glances and whispers from passing brothers.

James opens the sliding glass door to the backyard, he walks Theodore over to a metal table with a few metal chairs, he pulls one up for himself and Theodore. Theodore sits down quietly on the chair, James doing the same.

"So, where to begin, right?" James says in a playful mood, trying to lift the mood and break the ice.

The lens of Theodore flickers, rapidly adjusting to the lights and reflections found in the backyard. He fixes his posture in the chair to be more upright "I got no idea really where to start this, I ask what is on your mind, James" Theodore states.

James shifts a bit, what could he ask his once dead friend? What out of the thousands of questions would be the best to ask first, he thinks to himself. “How do you feel? Y’know, from being dead n’ all” he asks. James' voice was hesitant, as if he didn't even want Theodore to answer at all.

Theodore's internal motors quietly whirl, processing how to answer such a question, trying to remember the day he came alive. “I guess that question is as good as any.” he states. “That is a really hard thing to answer because, there really isn't a feeling or, just anything to compare it too. The closest feeling I can tie that with is the feeling you get when we were back in middle school. We were texting each other like crazy, hoping that Monday of school would get canceled due to snow. It wasn't until I was getting ready for the bus where my mom told me that school was closed due to ice or whatever. The feeling of relief that I got from...believe alive again? It was oddly similar, but 100 times stronger. When I was being transported to the hospital I was thinking of all the things I wanted to do but remembered that I was most likely going to die, so being alive again felt like a second wind.” Theodore explains. James sits there in the metal chair, looking down at his hands, his fingers twiddling with each other. Theodore's words made sense to him but it felt surreal hearing what death and revival “felt” like.

“How did your parents afford this? You, your body. How much did all of this cost?” James asks, starting to lose his composure. “How are you, alive? How is this real?” he continues, James beginning to tap his foot on the ground rapidly, discomfort growing stronger by the second.

“My parents uhm” Theodore hesitates, once again trying to find the words for James' answer.

“My parents had to drop nearly \$300,000 dollars to register me for the rebuild program. The expensive part of this entire thing was actually turning my ‘Mind’? If you can call it that, into codable data or whatever jargon they call it to actually put inside of this” Theodore knocks the side of his head a few times with his hand.

James continues to sit in the metal chair outside, any color of the outside world being drawn out by the dark overcast skies. James felt like a ticking time bomb just a few seconds before an explosion, and he looked like it too. Theodore continued his rant, getting ahead of himself with his new senses and life.

“Because I didn't explode from the impact of the accident, my brain was fully intact, which gave doctors, scientists, and maybe even necromancers for all that I know, the chance to upload the majority of my memories into this body; or brain. This robot thing is really new-” Theodore gets cut off, James standing up abruptly.

“Theodore!” James raises his voice, not realizing that he is nearly yelling, he collects himself. “Can we just go to the basketball court? This is a bit much for me” he says, his voice shaky and clearly disturbed.

“Oh, yea we can go. I didn't mean to-” Theodore gets cut off again.

“Let's just go, Theo.” James quietly states, voice still shaky. Already walking out of the front yard, not waiting for Theodore to get ready. James headed to his car outside parked in a secluded zone for the frat brothers. A few moments later Theodore opens the door to the passenger seat. Silently they were on their way to the basketball court close by, a total of 5 minutes passed without a single word, the only sound in the car emanating was the car's engine and Theodore's internal fans that hummed quietly. Eventually they made it to the basketball court, James and Theodore departing the car and closing the door behind themselves, James opening up his trunk to grab a spare basketball. The two entered the court which was surrounded by a chain linked fence, the green court floor looking extra dried out today.

“I still can't believe that this is real,” James quietly says to himself, dribbling the ball a few feet before starting to take some shots at the hoop.

“Hm? Did you say something?” Theodore asks, awkwardly standing off to the side as James starts retrieving and shooting the ball.

“Oh, uh I just can't believe that this is real,” James replies, bouncing the ball over to Theodore. He struggles to effectively possess the ball in his hands, awkwardly wrapping his arms around the ball. “You okay?” James asks, seeing Theodore struggle grasping the ball. Theodore adjusts and wiggles the basketball to his hands, possessing the ball a bit better before trying to shoot it, the ball falling pathetically four feet in front of him.

“James, you didn't let me finish. This body isn't made for physical activity. I am only able to walk and hold stuff.” Theodore replies, a bit of disappointment dripped from his voice, he was internally hoping that he'd still be able to play basketball.

James stares at Theodore just like he did the first time seeing his new form, though this time James stare was venomous. “So, you can't play basketball? You can't hit baseballs with me at the batting range?” James' voice started to break a bit. “We can't go hiking? We can't go to the gym anymore?”

“We can still do that stuff, but I am not really able to do much.” Theodore explains. Picking up the basketball that was on the ground and checking it to James. He catches the ball though stares down Theodore with daggers, is his friend of nearly 18 years really reduced down to just a voice? He thought to himself. He continues and shoots hoops, not looking at Theodore's general direction anymore. He continues to shoot shot after shot, remaining silent, quietly cursing under his breath with every miss, the collection of dinks and airballs start to grow, his voice mirroring the collecting misses.

“damnit” he muttered. Another airball.

“Fuck” his voice starting to raise even more now. Theodore seeing the agitation from James makes him take a few steps back as he endlessly continues the infuriating cycle of missing and retrieving the ball.

“Are you alright?” Theodore asks with a concerned tone.
James answered back instantly without warning.

His voice still raised “Shut up! Im fine” he yells, the meaning of what he just blurted out seeming to sober him up and snapped him out of the cycle.

“I, I am sorry I didn’t mean to yell” James replied, before Theodore could even respond, James’ phone began to ring. He takes it out of his pocket and puts it up to his ear

“Hello? What do you want Troy” he asks. The tone in his voice still annoyed him. Theodore was quiet but still listened to the best of his ability.

“Dude, people are starting to show up to the party. What are you doing?” Troy replies. James looks back at Theodore, a sense of rage built inside of him just like before.

“Im not doing anything important, I'll be over at the house in a few minutes, bye” James abruptly hangs up the phone and gets ready, walking back to his car.

“Let's go” he states, in an emotionless voice. He puts the basketball away and starts the car, waiting for Theodore. His hydraulic legs work their magic and start walking Theodore to the car door, entering and sitting down. James puts the key in the ignition and starts the car, quickly driving back to the frat house. The day slowly melted away into darkness as the sun started to set.

The two pulled up to the house with dozens of people starting to walk in through the front door. James got out and along came Theodore, as he got out though a few already drunken members started to take interest at the fact there was someone from the rebuild program at the function.

“Hey Iron Man! What the fuck are you doin’ here?” one of the drunk party members yells out, loudly chuckling along with the rest of his group as they walk into the house.
Theodore wanted to say something back, but didn’t dare too, not with a bunch of drunk frat brothers around.

He turned to James “I don’t think I belong here” he mutters. James starts to walk to the crowd, not even turning to face him.

“I agree.” he says in a flat tone of voice. “Theodore, You can’t even drink. I think you should just leave” he continued.

“But, it's only been a few hours since we got to talking, I thought you would want to talk to me after everything.” Theodore says, once more getting cut off by James.

“I thought so too, though you can’t do anything. We can’t play ball, go hiking, go drinking or anything. Theodore is dead, and you aren’t him” he finally states, Theodore stands there right out front of the door of the house, slowly losing sight of James getting lost in the crowd.

James walks into the party with what felt like the world weighing on his heart. The friend that he once cared most about being reduced to a pile of metal and a voice box was too much for him to take, so he drowned himself in cheap friends and even cheaper alcohol. Just to forget that today even happened.

The cold brisk air of Oregon’s coast hits Ron’s face, leaving his ears and nose red from the low temperature. He drives down to the coast every so often after the accident just to think to himself, what could have he said, what could he have done to change what happened. The overcast continued to loom for what seemed like forever across the skies. The coast was the perfect place for Ron to be away from his screens, even though he was on them way more than he probably should be. He sat on a bench right before where the grass met the sand, and where the ocean was only 60 feet away from him. This would almost be the exact spot where they’d be surfing that day if things were different.

Ron enjoyed living in his student apartment a lot, because he didn’t have to answer to his parents at all, he could virtually do anything that he wanted. He can eat out at panda express if he wanted, he can drive around in circles at a roundabout, play video games for 12 hours at a time, and do homework at the last minute, and he can drive out to the coast whenever he wanted too.

Ron’s phone buzzed rapidly in his car, out of earshot due to his phone being on vibrate. Ron continues to think to himself about that day, at this point in his thinking the development of new ideas simply ceased inside of his mind, just the dozen repeating ones continue to spiral in his mind like a revolver cylinder, nearly drowning out the sounds of footsteps approaching behind him, the sounds of lens flickering and motors softly filled the air.

“Ron?” The familiar voice announces himself, its voice was warm and static could be heard already. Ron didn’t even hear the voice at first, his mind turbulent with thoughts and questions.

“You there?” the voice asked once again, finally Ron got out of his head. He turns around to see Theodore, it was his first time seeing him though he was aware of his existence. The fiasco with him and James a few weeks back left a big scar that was the parent’s friend group, blame was thrown at each other like tomahawks, ranging from James’ near alcoholism, to Theodore’s parents’ almost hysterical state with the rebuild program. Ron gazes at the metal works of Theodore’s physical form, the few that he has seen online of those who have been rebuilt are almost identical to their old looks. Theodore’s appearance was clearly not human whatsoever, though he found interest in it due to how almost brutalist sci-fi it was.

“Theodore, I assume that’s you?” Ron asks, already guessing that it was him considering that there wouldn’t be any other robot that would know his name.

“Yup, it's me.” Theodore replied, sitting down next to Ron. The mist of the waves crashing in the distance, the accumulation of the moisture gathering on his lens which is wiped off by a comically small wiper, something similar to what a car has when the weather is bad.

Ron adjusts his figure as Theodore sits next to him, he wasn't expecting company at this time; especially the one person that he was out here for, though nonetheless Ron was very surprised that he was having this conversation. “I am surprised that you are hear-” Theodore interrupts Ron.

“Just ask whatever you are going to ask.” He said in a tired tone, the static in his voice becoming more noticeable, but still coherent. Theodore had been through these games before and was very tired of them.

“Right,” Ron replied in a soft tone. He continued, “How do you feel?”

Theodore's heart sank a bit hearing those words, for a situation like his this question wasn't uncommon at all though it just reminded him of what happened between him and James. “I feel like myself,” he replies.

“Like, entirely? You don't feel like a robot?” Ron says Theodore was practically a walking sci-fi novel that Ron could ask any question too, he couldn't help himself to ask a few of the technical questions.

“I suppose so, I feel like a normal human you could say. I can hear fine, smell is basically nonexistent, I can't really feel much anywhere on my body besides my hands, I guess the engineers didn't care to install sensors anywhere else but my hands but I am used to it at this point, it feels normal.” Theodore explains. His tone was flat and didn't carry much emotion to it.

“Pardon me asking these stupid questions,” Ron says, a bit worried that by his tone that Theodore was getting bored of him.

“Just usually your friend doesn't turn into a robot, so I am curious. Can you connect to TV or the internet? Could you hack the government or something?” Ron said with a chuckle. Theodore wasn't expecting much of humor since his last interactions with James, though Ron's questions were refreshing.

“Uh, not I am not able to hack or connect to anything. If you connected a microwave to the internet would it be able to control where it was on the internet?” Theodore replied with a welcoming laugh.

“True, true. How have you been since you've come back to life and whatnot.” Ron could probably guess that it hasn't been good, but he didn't want to be rude and only ask one of his closest friends random questions.

“They've been, uh, different. My parents have been acting weird, they've been treating me more like...I guess for lack of a better term, a god? Anything I ask for privacy or something to do they drop everything

to come and fulfill whatever I want. I don't even want that much! They always ask me if I am okay or if I need anything which I hardly ever need, though they ask literally every ten minutes. Probably something to do with getting their son back from death so I can't really blame them." he explains. He gazes out to the ocean, watching the waves crash into the surface of the water.

"I don't know if I should say sorry or something else" Ron replies, joining Theodore in watching the horizon of the endless ocean.

"Y'know, I don't know either" Theodore adds. Slightly hunching over as he sits, putting his claws/hands together. There was a moment of silence between the two.

"How do you know that, you are you?" Ron asks. The weight of the question feels like it's heavier than the earth. Theodore turns to Ron.

"What do you mean?"

"Like, did they transfer your consciousness to this body?" Ron continues.

Theodore lets out a static sigh as he remembers the conversation that he had with James. "Its, a long story, Ron." he continues, "it's some bullshit long explanation like people taking brain tissue or neurons from my body and turning it into data. That is all that really needs to be said" his tone was very dismissive, reminding himself more of the incident with James.

"So, if we are being really technical, you aren't exactly Theodore that I know" Ron says, trying to be delicate with his words.

"What?" Theodore now entirely confused, a bit offended though more curious to Ron's explanation.

"Like, if you don't have the exact same consciousness as from your original body, then your current one is new. The real Theodore that I know died nearly 2 months ago." Ron continues. His words hit heavily against Theodore's mind. What would he be if he wasn't the same Theodore? He thought to himself.

"What am I?" Theodore mutters to himself. He looks down into his robotic claw-like hands.

"I suppose you are still Theodore. When Star Wars rebooted, it was different, but still continued the story of Star Wars." Ron continues "You are a bit different, but ultimately continuing the story of Theodore." The moment passed them silently as they both collected their thoughts.

"I guess," Theodore replied, his tone emotionless as to make out what to think of himself. "Star Wars could've ended naturally. The reboot was kinda shitty in my opinion." Ron nodded and agreed with Theodore, they both really did not like the reboot of Star Wars at all.

“Yea I definitely agree with that” he says. Ron kicks a rock next to his foot, it skips over to the sand and finally rests a few feet away. The saltiness of the ocean air being almost drowned out by the silence of these two.

“Do,” Theodore hesitates before continuing, “Do you think that Theodore led a good life?” His voice was quiet but firm.

The question from Theodore hit Ron like a bomb, it was the easiest question to answer in the world, though Ron could already see the implications of his question.

“Without a doubt; out of the three of us you were the most social and well rounded. In my eyes it felt like you could do no wrong,” Ron stopped for a moment before continuing, “You were my best friend, when I was told in that hospital room that you didn’t make it; I was just ruined. I stopped eating and couldn’t sleep for days, weeks even!” Ron’s voice was shaky and hesitant, “and I would’ve reached out sooner when I found out that you did that rebuild program, though in all honesty it just opened a lot of old wounds that I wasn’t sure that I was ready to tackle again.”

Theodore fell silent to the explanation that Ron gave, his mind and heart weighed heavier than ever before, though it felt like it was slowly decompressing from the immense weight. Ron slowly gets up from the bench, still facing the ocean. He turns to Theodore and meets his gaze.

“I am really sorry, Theodore. I really am sorry that you had to come back to all of this. All of our worlds are completely different with you gone, but you entered back into an equally different world that already accepted you being gone.” Ron’s voice hitched, “it might be selfish of me, but I really do wish you the best, and I will never wish for any less. I hope you can find comfort in this life, I hope you will find something that you are able to do and love it.” he concludes. Theodore sits there on the bench, motionless, staring at Ron intensely. For a while that little wiper on his lens had stopped and the accumulation of moisture had built up large droplets that ran down the glass lens.

“I am going to leave. I, I can’t stay any longer. Is there anything else you would like to say, Theodore?” he asks walking back to his car slowly, turning once more to face Theodore.

There was one more moment of silence between the two, at this point the droplets of water started to seep into the internals of Theodore’s metal torso, damaging wires or circuits. He could notice a sense that something was being damaged inside of him, though he just stared at Ron.

“Thank you for talking with me, Ron. Please drive home safe.” he muttered quietly, but loud enough to be heard by him. Ron gave him a nod and opened his car door, he entered it and started the car to drive away. As he was pulling out and driving down the gravel road to civilization, he couldn’t help but to stare at Theodore for as long as he could, turning his head to look back at Theodore one last time before he was out of sight; Ron continued to drive back home and not look back.

Theodore knew that his time was slowly ticking away, being out near the water like this. The motors inside him starting to slow and fail due to the water damages. He softly sighed, looking up to the grey skies to see dark grey clouds like usual. There was one cloud that was making its way to land that was extra dark and blocking any view past it with a thick downpour of rain.

Theodore looks around his surroundings, taking note of the dark scenery that was the Oregon coast. Though what caught his attention was a long brown and white surf board hitched on the back of a Jeep. The parking lot was extremely empty, and the owners of the car seemed to be completely gone. He got up from the bench and made his way to the jeep, inspecting the surf board visually and running his hand down the side of it. One metal claw swiftly cuts the connecting wires that were holding down the surfboard to the back of the jeep, Theodore grabs each side of the board and holds it under his arm. Starting to walk out to the beach.

From the openings and seams of the metal plating, small amounts of smoke started to emanate from Theodore, that black cloud almost descended onto him with all of its rain and fury. He continues to walk down the beach, the sand pressing against his metal feet as he reaches the shore. His ankles submerged under the smaller waves until the ocean was up to his waist, this was where he laid out the board onto the water. Theodore climbed on top of the increasingly moist surfboard and laid down directly flat onto his stomach, his arms scooping water and propelling himself forward until he was free from the smaller waves. The rain and water from the ocean began to develop him as several critical processes began to shut down or fail entirely.

He rotates himself in the water, facing the land once again; Theodore occasionally looks back to see if there were any potential waves that he could ride which, as fate would have it, there was one big one coming his way. Quickly Theodore begins to paddle himself to gain speed with his arms. The swell of the wave began to develop more until it was nearly on top of Theodore. With failing circuits and waterlogged motherboards, Theodore catches the wave, swiftly pushing himself up on the board until he is standing upright, the surf board cutting through the wave perfectly. Theodore at every moment felt like he was going to fall, the gyroscope in his head ceasing function; the unbalanced machine kept his posture upright for a few moments, salt water spraying against him. The clouds were now entirely dark, and there was a thick rainy haze that made it almost impossible to see the shore, but he was just barely able to...just a little bit. Sparks began to fly out his joints as wires now lose their connections and become more waterlogged. Finally; one bad swerve of the board made Theodore tip more and more until he fell over into the watery depths.

He landed hard onto his back, his lens watching the sky get submerged in water as he slowly descended to the darkness, his whole body shutting down second by second as the ocean claimed him. He thought of his parents in these moments, a part of him felt a sense of guilt doing this to them, especially since they spent so much of their money to bring him back. Though the rebuild program insurance would most likely pay them back 10 fold, it was the least that they could do.

As Theodore continued to sink deeper into the sea, the light from the surface continued to darken. He thought of his friends in these final moments, even after everything that he had experienced in the last few weeks; he still loved them both like brothers. He wished for the best for Ron, and he wished for the best for James, he didn't blame either of them.

Finally; the last flickles of light glisten in the void. In his final moment, was he really Theodore? Was he just an automaton blessed by science with the knowledge and memories of Theodore to think that he was Theodore? He didn't know; but he knew it was time for Theodore to rest.