

## Excerpt from Iron Earth, Chapter I: The Homeless, Ethan Rain

On the corner of Turner Street a glorious beam of light pierced the darkness from the window of a small betting shop. It was the last remaining building that still retained its entire cement outer-shell. The rest of the street had eroded away to the iron skin of the planet. A commotion arose from inside and two large, bald men appeared at the entrance, carrying a raggedy man who shouted curses at his captors. The muscle dragged him to the door and cast him out onto the street. Bewildered, the haggard man lost his balance and rolled towards the road.

The homeless man, dressed in rags which sparsely covered his filthy skin, lay in the gutter beside the shop. His head was swimming from the impact of the pavement. He lay dazed with his face buried in a discarded newspaper and his hair floated in slime. Dirt pooled around him. He dreamt of a beautiful woman whose skin glowed with soft virtue. She took him by the hand and led him far from his iron hell. He was momentarily stirred from his dream by the damp, rusty smell which filled his nostrils. It was the ever-present odour of Iron Earth, made all the more poignant lying face-first in sewage. The slip of a man was in his late twenties. A thick layer of dirt obscured his pale skin, his hair was brown and caked in mud and his only possession was a grubby black courier bag, lazily slung over his left shoulder.

He sluggishly removed the paper from his face, the headline read: 'Government Dissolved, *Literally!*' He cast it to one side and rolled over. A small girl approached the vagrant and reached out to poke him.

'Are you okay, mister?' she said. The tramp lunged to his feet with great ferocity,

'Ge' back you lil shit! I have nobbing fo ya.' With that he staggered and fell against the wall of the bookies and sank to his knees. The girl trembled but approached him again.

'Are you drunk, mister?'

'Was i' to you?' He snapped back. The girl noticed a half-empty bottle in his leathery grasp.

'Do you have somewhere to go? What is your name?' said the girl as she drew closer to steal a look at the man's face. However she gagged and quickly recoiled from the smell of vomit on his breath.

'My name... my name!' The man stood up and raised his drink to the sky. '...is Ethan Rain.' With that he collapsed in a heap on the ground and began to laugh. As his chest shuddered, tears swelled in his eyes and his drunken glee tailed off into a whimper.

'Well, at least you have a name. I don't know my real one. People call me Robin.' The girl said. She put her arm around Ethan and tried to lift him to his feet. 'Come on, you need a bed to-night. You can stay at the refuge.' Robin thrust upward with all her might, but her stick-legs buckled and she fell to the ground beside him. 'Ethan, you're too heavy for me. You have to help.' She stood up again and put Ethan's arm over her shoulder.

'Why are you 'elpin' mee?' Ethan mumbled, before throwing up down the front of his mouldy, torn shirt.

'Gosh, that's disgusting!' The little girl jumped back. 'Right, you wait here. I'm going to get

some help.' Robin ran off through the light mist that covered the surface of the metallic streets. Ethan flopped back onto the ground and gazed up at the sky. Though the night was clear and black, no stars shone. He was trapped in the loneliest place in the galaxy. He wondered if anything existed beyond this hurt and despair. Ethan lay alone with his drunken thoughts for what felt like forever. He wondered whether the weird girl had been real or whether it was his longing mind taunting him again. He watched others pass by; they didn't appear to even notice him. Although, he didn't blame them. On the Iron Earth everyone had problems. He wondered if there was an Ethan Rain on the corner of every road.