

Excerpt from *Final Liberation*, Chapter One: Day

The room was cooler than before, even from within his supple confines. A linen duvet, a soft, white baby blanket, cushions, pillows and a throw. He wanted for nothing. Simply getting out of bed was an almost insurmountable task exacerbated by the biting, pale air around him. There was a fierce draft as if the window had been wide-open for hours on a cold winters day, however, it appeared to be firmly fastened shut. Each and every breath produced a puff of steam. He twisted under the duvet until he had created a cocoon and totally imprisoned himself; safe and snug in his fortress. The time was ten o'clock. Then the man remained utterly still, not daring to respire. No sounds echoed from outside nor inside the room, save for the steady tick of the watch. Every second was accounted for without fail yet the hands remained still. Surely he had awoken but it felt as if there was no time at all. It was as if he had been there forever.

Although secured within his personal nest, the door loomed. It expanded and stretched before him. Shadows tiptoed from between the cracks and spread as streaming water. The man shut his eyes and rolled over. He felt exposed, as if someone gazed upon him; present and unavoidable. It called to him as a friend might and persuaded him to join it. Its irresistible allure overpowered his desire to remain safe. The muscles in his arms and legs tensed for the first time in an age. He took one deep breath, then another, and finally burst from his squishy shell and charged at the door. It didn't budge. The handle was hot to the touch, but there was no smoke, no smell of burning and no crackle of flames. With all his might he yanked at the door. It pulled and contorted it to the point of breaking yet it did not budge an inch. He tapped on the wooden panels. The sound was heavy and hollow. He wrapped his knuckles against the brickwork beside the door, which sounded identical. He collapsed to his knees, pounding uselessly at the door. The callouses on his knuckles peeled away and bled. He stared at his hands and thought, *this time, is this the furthest I've gotten?*

before, the maFirst, came the sound of a creaking hinge, then a potent scent; an obnoxious bouquet of gas and candy floss. Great columns of white smoke flooded the entire room. Despite its density, he did not choke. At first, an ethereal light shone through the open doorway, which obscured the being. As the light diminished and the shroud dissipated he saw with clarity. There it floated, an organism of symbols and energy. Although it possessed a physical form, the being was virtually incomprehensible to him save for the plasma-like surface at its centre. One single image was projected on it. The face of a man whom he vaguely recognised.

“Who are you?” He said. The being shimmered and the projected face faded into infinity. A million tiny organisms writhed around each other and reformed in an instant, each one had a translucent back which changed in colour and tone. When side by side they created a tapestry for the light being’s next image. This time a single letter, the greek letter ‘Ω’.

“I don’t mean to sound rude...” He said. The man cast his gaze to the floor and hurriedly placed both hands over his naked crotch. He blushed. “Forgive me, it has been a while since I had guests. Omega was it? Are you an Omega or are you named Omega?” The image shifted once again, the sound of a million teeming legs broke the uneasy silence. This time it displayed an orchid, then a rose, then a daffodil, then lavender and then a lily. “Flowers?” He said. Then the image shifted to a single rose. “A red rose.” The being shone brighter than before. The man couldn’t be certain of what it felt, or if it indeed felt at all, but assumed it was pleased. The being then displayed itself amongst a series of other similar looking creatures. They all housed a living screen at their core, otherwise their forms varied wildly. One was raptor-like in shape but made of cirrus clouds and tendons. The next was dark, rotund and egg-like. Another appeared to be flatter and taller with a peacock display of fluffy tendrils. “There are certainly a few of you.” He said. “You’re all Omega?” The being vibrated violently and the room shook. Its image shifted to display only its own form with the Greek letter beside it. “Nice to meet you, Omega.” He shook as he held out a

hand to greet the being. "I would tell you my name but I appear to have forgotten it. Along with everything else." The man was unsure where on the being it was polite to look. The display at its centre appeared to be where its senses were housed and its main method of communication. The number '4' formed. The man stared with a vacant expression on his tired face. "Four what?" Omega remained unmoved. "Four is a number. Have I been in this room for four days?" The room vibrated again, the tremor was even more dramatic than the previous occurrence. The being showed itself beside the letter 'Ω' and then the man beside the number '4'. "Four is not a name, it's not a species. Joshua or Ashley, Patrick or Jenna, Rasmus or Monika, Adam or Cora, Dan or Amanda those are names. Am not a number, I am a free man!"

Omega remained motionless for a while. When a horizontal array of light projected from its core. It started at the ceiling and worked its way the floor. The man ran his hand through it, allowing the light to hit his fingers. It was like the beam from an old film projector. The light hovered on the discs scattered on the floor. A short, moving image formed and played on repeat. A young Judy Garland adorned in her iconic blue dress, visualised in vibrant technicolour, held a small, black dog in her arms. Tiny people emerged from the scenery all around her. The man reached out towards the image and quoted familiar words.

"Toto, I have a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore." He laughed to himself with a tear in his eye. "Even Toto has a damn name." The image flickered away and was replaced with the man's reflection and the number '4'. That was then followed by Arnold Schwarzenegger, who wore a black leather jacket. Arnold looked down at him with a grim expression and held an outstretched hand. The man mouthed the words, *come with me if you want to live*.

Omega then vanished. The door was left ajar. Although his bed beckoned, it had become grey and cast in shadow. The man knew that route. A terror rose inside him as he thought, *what lies beyond*

the door? The man took a long look around his home; the plant, the candlestick, the collection of books and films. He sighed. Deep down he knew that he would never see any of it ever again. The cold air subsided. Though he felt the vague illusion of a nervous heartbeat inside his chest, he was ready. The man turned to face the open doorway. "I am, Four." He said and stepped out.