

# Utopia

Hills of withered grass rolled by Joseph 1346's window, like a never-ending desert. Joseph. One of only three names the All-Seers allowed for male children, (hence the numbers), though people never called anybody by their numbers, unless they were introducing themselves. A week ago, this Joseph had been offered the job of "Agent". This was a rare honour. Few people had ever been offered a position of such importance. This was mainly because this position was offered only to those who the All-Seers thought could handle it. Agents must be willing to do whatever they are told, without question. At least, that's what it had said on the invitation. Joseph, however, was about to find that this was much easier said than done.

Joseph 1346 was being driven to the Agent's Academy, the Agent headquarters, where he would spend the rest of his life. That is until he was deemed unfit, at which point he would be Cleared. *I wonder what being "Cleared" is*, he thought. He dismissed the thought. No one was allowed to think about anything but the day's routine. He peered out of his window again, straining for a glance of something, *anything*. There was nothing but the brown hills and the enormous Wall in the distance. Joseph was eager to get to the Academy.

It was late by the time the car reached the Academy. Eleven-thirty, well past curfew. Joseph looked at the sky, which was dark and cloudy as usual. It wouldn't get dark in Utopia until the All-Seers saw through their cameras that everyone was asleep. In front of him was a wrought-iron gate bigger than most houses, and a barbed wire fence just as tall, stretching in either direction. To his right, there was a small keypad held up by a wooden pole with wires strung all around it like vines. On the screen, there were three words: **NAME AND NUMBERS**. Joseph punched his in. The gates opened with a sharp creaking noise. Behind them stood a large, cement building. There were no windows. Above two metal doors, etched in the façade of the building: **AGENT'S ACADEMY**. With a hiss, the doors began to open, revealing a large bald man in a suit and plain red tie whom he assumed was an Agent. "Joseph 1346. Welcome to the Academy. If you'll follow me, I'll lead you to your quarters", the Agent said.

Inside, there was a giant circular room. There were tunnels labeled with street names from the Habitation Sectors all around him. In the middle of them was an elevator shaft. Joseph and the Agent entered the elevator. Inside, there was one row of glowing buttons that lined the wall,



## Utopia

labeled zero, one, two, three. The Agent pressed "one". Seconds later, Joseph was led out of the elevator into a wood-floored corridor dotted with doors. One of the lights on the ceiling flickered. "Third one to your left. Four-thirty in the morning."

Joseph nodded. His room was quite simple: a bed, a nightstand, and a small washroom. Joseph was tired. He set his bags down and undressed quickly. Then, he crawled into bed, rested his head in the UtopiaVision helmet on his bedframe, and let the Agency-approved images fill his head.

In the morning chimes filled Joseph's head, followed by the phrase *The Utopian way is the only way*. He got up, washed up, combed his jet-black hair, and got dressed into the button-up grey suit that had been left for him. He opened his door to find a woman in a green jumpsuit and brown boots holding a clipboard. "Good morning, Joseph 1346. My name is Ella 2435. You shall call me Instructor." Joseph nodded, "Yes Instructor." She smiled, "Come, your meal is waiting. Eat quickly. Training starts soon." He followed her into the elevator.

This time, "two" was pressed. The doors opened to a corridor similar to his, but white, and the doors lining the walls were all metal. "This is where Agents are briefed on the streets they will be patrolling," she explained. "They are fed during the briefing." Instructor led him down the corridor, then turned left. They stopped in front of the door at the far end of the hallway. The door opened automatically. Inside was a small table and one chair.

On the table was a tinfoil plate, with a slice of shining pink meat. Joseph sat down. Facing him was television on the wall. It blinked on, revealing.... something. The thing was orange with black stripes. It looked scared. "The world outside Utopia is filled with horrid creatures, like that one, called a tiger. Sometimes, these creatures find ways into Utopia. As an Agent, it will be your duty to locate and dispose of these abominations, and any who have come into contact with them," said Instructor, "along with anyone who disobeys the Rules, of course."

On the screen, a man in a large overcoat appeared, wielding a strange device. There was a flash, and the tiger went limp. The screen blinked off. Joseph didn't know what to feel. The creature had looked *scared*. "Eat. Physical training begins soon."

After 14 long hours of gruelling exercise, Joseph was eager to get into bed. Just before he lay his head in the UtopiaVision, however, he stopped. He knew he wasn't supposed think about *Utopia*

## Utopia

much, but no matter how hard he tried, his thoughts kept drifting back to that creature, that *tiger*. *Who's the real monster?* he thought. This time he didn't dismiss it. The next morning, he went through the same process, except this time, Instructor didn't say anything, and the creature on the screen was a man and the agent was female, in different clothes, using a different weapon. Instructor wouldn't let him look away.

About halfway through the day, while Joseph was taking a break from an exhausting 10k run on one of the tracks behind the complex, sirens began to blare. From the tunnel labeled "Street 1984", there came a rust-covered train. Two agents disembarked, carrying the limp body of a man who was in very bad shape.

His face was a bloody mess, his clothes in tatters, revealing several deep red gashes. The main doors behind him began to open. Behind those was a black truck. The Agents tossed the man's body into the back, with several others, both creature and human. Closing the door with a slam, one of the Agents hit the side of the truck, which proceeded to drive into the distance.

The doors closed with an echoing thud. The sirens stopped wailing. Joseph turned to find Instructor. "We cannot leave bodies lying around in the city." she said.

"Oh." was all he could manage. She paused. Joseph realized he must have looked shocked.

"How did you feel?" she asked.

"How did I feel about what?"

"The events that just transpired before you."

This time, Joseph paused. "I felt..." his mind raced for any word but "scared". Instructor was staring at him intently. "Normal," he said finally.

Instructor jotted something down on her clipboard. "That's all for today." she said, "you are dismissed."

In the following weeks, the images on the television grew increasingly worse, and now there was always a paper next to his meal, asking him how he felt. The training too, was becoming more difficult. Instructor trained him with these things called "guns" and "knives". She made the weights heavier, and the running longer. Joseph would often return to his room aching and



tired, his clothes drenched in sweat. This was an enormous problem, as Joseph grew more and more reluctant to lay his head in the headset on his bed. He didn't want those images in his head, not anymore.

One morning, Joseph opened his door to find that Instructor had been replaced by two Agents, one man and one woman, in black suits with red ties. They said nothing, nor did they make any gestures; they just began walking towards the elevator. Instinctively, Joseph followed. Once in the elevator, the woman pressed "three". This time, the doors opened not to a corridor but to a series of identical cube-shaped rooms. The Agents opened the door to the first room.

Inside, an orange animal with black stripes stood in a small cage at the far end of the room. A tiger. In front of the cage was a wooden stool. On it, lay a gun that the Instructor had called a "pistol", and things he recognized as "earbuds".

He realized what he had to do. A tear rolled down his cheek. Slowly, he placed the earbuds in his ears, and raised the pistol. The tiger looked at him with big green eyes. The camera in the corner of the room turned to face him. He stared into the lens of the camera. Is this what he really wanted? He was torn. He squeezed his eyes shut. He took a deep, shaky breath. Joseph shot.

# The End