

R E F U N D S F O R
MACHINES
A /S_ERIES _OF SHORT >STORIES

) CAMPAIGN (

re.occurrence

(leo mara)

.Preinstallation 376GB – 376GB installed (refresh/updates <in progress>205mb of 861mb downloaded)

White filled ninety-nine percent of the bar beside the cover art. A digitally drawn, rifled and armed, action posed Fivad. Overlayed with 'IIII.IIII' and double exposed with a devastated landscape. Pillars of bloated smoke ascending into a beautifully multitone sunset. This was an image long to be remembered by its demographic. For better or for worse.

Screams. Heavy shoegaze played at a low volume out the speakers set behind the three monitors and the ice white LEDs backlighting the behind wall.

Forcefully upright in his little-while-ago sibling-gifted desk chair, Einar rested his head back and confronted the ceiling. He held his tired eyes closed, inviting the persuasive sensation of an unfought drift between consciousness and unconsciousness. Crossing, partially, into dreams. Distorted recreations of still-to-process experiences. Particularly the recent time where his state of existence was in question.

A sudden stab disrupted his rest. Fierce pain in his bladder, his ribs, and his back.

Pulling his reawakened attention down, he returned to his three PC monitors. He scanned the list of news reports sourced from other credited sites...

uploaded -10 seconds ago

OUT BEFORE THE VOTE – Ahead of Friday's exit voting, former boxer Craig Spoen has been forcefully removed from TPTV+'s THE WAITING ROOM for his comments on new immigration...

Einar picked a bottle opener up off his desk and rubbed his thumb against the 3D printed replication of a faction icon from MAKO II. He read the next post...

uploaded -4 minutes ago

PROTEST ARRESTS | 'Off-Machine' Protests -thread – Five more arrested in London in ongoing plea for nation to reassess implem...

Einar gripped the matched white-lit, white gloss mouse connected to his computer. He minimised the communal news page and hovered over the audio streaming platform TME, reading some of the names of songs on the suggested playlist. He took a drawn-out sip from a bottled beer. Internal pains intensified when he swallowed.

01:46:10

The time was massive. Digits and colon in an excessively vibrant blood orange, neighbour to an analogue clock that together, took up the entire smaller, third computer monitor.

Einar pinched the almost emptied bottle between his fingers like plyers. He played with it. Moved it to feel its weight shift. What little satisfaction and distraction it brought as the milliseconds in front of him raced.

There was a temptation to withdraw. To abandon long anticipated plans. To fumble his commitment and ultimately, retreat sooner to remaining safety. If he chose to avert from the established ending.

There were two thumps which shook the ceiling.

Einar set his music even further into the background. He twisted the small plastic blinders out the way of the two positioned-apart cameras, one mounted just above his central monitor, the other to one side of his desk. He pulled up the program Upstream on his left screen, tapped a key and live feeds from both cameras appeared in a sub-window each next to each other. The corner of a sizable packing box resealed with yellow tape. A framed print unstuck from and now leant against the magnolia wall. The clues were left in shot behind his head and slumped shoulders. He recognised that. He understood the implications viewers might try to pick apart.

Einar collected his brushed metal headset, adjusted the attached microphone to sit a little closer to his lips and edging facial hair. He started up another program, Meeter, scrolled before it had entirely loaded, and hit the 'connect' next to Jevgeni's profile icon.

"Tere."

Hi. "Tere," Einar greeted back, and looked again at the time. "Five minutes?"

"Yeah?" Jevgeni answered, unsure.

Both spoke with distinctive, and distinctive from each other, Northern European accents. Einar's smeared though Danish. Jevgeni's Estonian. Uncompromising.

"Turn on on one-fifty-one. Leaves us nine minutes of introduction," Einar petitioned. "That good? That long enough for an introduction before we start?"

"Perfect. Yes, perfect. If, you're sure...?"

Einar chose not to answer.

Respecting the likely intentioned non-response, Jev continued, "Two-thousand-and-forty in the foyer. What was it last time... three thousand? What do you have-" He asked, "Do you have anyone?"

Einar checked the constant slightly adjusting number on his Upstream. The number, his count in a separately joinable virtual space, was higher. "Around the same." Two-thousand-two-hundred waited. "Two thousand."

"Do you remember what it was last time?" Jev enquired.

"Similar again. Two or three thousand."

01:48:51

"Have you shit?" Jev asked. "Tonight? In the last few hours."

The taste had sailed from his tongue, but Einar felt his early dinner stored inside his stomach still. The wet chicken. And the day past expiry mushrooms, bacon, and rice. Cooked in five minutes, dished in coloured plastic, cold in two minutes. "I haven't," he regretted. And expected to regret even more further into the night.

Einar recognised his friends attempts to conversate. And he tried to accommodate, however he was stuck. Stuck somewhere between respect for and appreciation of Jev's efforts and a constant cynicism that the small talk was unambitious and diminishing of the fact unjust circumstances were just unjust circumstances.

"Do you want to talk after?" Jev cut through.

↑2682 ↑2689 ↑2691 ↓2688 ↑2702

“I’m fine, Jev.”

“Summarise your current state with five words,” Jev said, quoting the infamous first line of dialogue from Chat Therapies, with a little, though noticeable, attempt to sound less Estonian.

“Disappointed,” he offered. “Scared.” Felt too honest. “Hurting. Very physical.”

“I’m sorry.”

Jev was the furthest person from blame. “You’re good.”

An unrestful breath was caught by Jev’s microphone. “Okay,” Jev said.

01:50:21

Then, quieter, “One last time.”

Through his own headphones, Einar heard movement. Scuffles. He dragged his mouse, hit a few keys, and live footage from Jev’s own reaction camera appeared on his Upstream, side-by-side and aligned with his own two camera feeds. Jevgeni, like Einar, imprisoned himself in a neon-lit box with little behind him. Hiding evidence that he, too, broadcasted from a cramped, single occupant bedroom with a monthly rent matching that of a three-bed outside the city. He fitted his custom-stickered Mission GEN I VR headset which was purposely designed so that the curving sides of the pinkish-red eye-covering half mask fit together with most available high-end gaming headphones.

Einar followed suit, picking up his own IN OCEAN VR headset. Spine stiff, he tried not to move putting his head through the two main straps of the monotone set. It hung heavy around his neck, just against his sore chest.

↓2631 ↑2657

All contributions were connected. The three streams of reaction camera footage, two on him, one on Jev, a second stream of the gameplay that would be displayed through his headset, and the public session chat. They were prepared to go online.

01:51:09

Einar’s stomach growled. A pressure inflated. On Upstream, he hit ‘launch’. The downsized icons of his waiting viewership spilled from the foyer into the theatre.

ROILA81T: ...first comment

“Set,” Einar informed Jevgeni.

Einar watched the third cam. Jev pulled a small grin. “Tere hommikust, sõbrad. Morning, friends,” he introed, placid, confident. “How are you? Thank you for joining us. It is grea- er, great to see you have all chosen to join us for what is to be the end of a very long... and epic and emotional journey. One which has seen us through the latter of our childhoods.”

ssSsabrine: i might cry
GUNN3RII: good to be here
okarlSaaro: Hommikurst
okarlSaaro: Kust*

“...We’ve been waiting some time for this final Part. Let me- Let me look, because I can’t exactly remember how long...” Jevgeni moved to a quick search on his phone.

“...That’s some indication of how long it has been,” Einar joked, to fill the aired pause.

“...‘Earth and Unrooted Wire’, that’s instalment three of this fourth End Genesis, the last part until now... was released October, last year. End Genesis Four instalments two, and one, were the last year as well. March and June. Every few months apart they were released... apart from this final part.”

JenofBlade: EG3i2 playthrough extended cut, pleaseeee. so many big moments not in upload.

NEWedd 000: i don’t want t to be over

32CRUSH: where have you been ein?

“It’s one- one-fifty-two AM here, for us both, here in the UK, in London,” Jev looked to another corner of his screens. “For us’, I’m referring to myself, Jev’s Quest, and my online comrade, Genesis brother, Einar, *Don’tTalkBeta*, DTB-Zero-Zero-Zero-Zero.” He rolled his shoulders. “To do a ‘previously on’...”

IMADETOWERWARS: Einar is alive??

888 Frans: Minutes ot go.

Jetwhitesteve: DTB-0000, missed you

IMADETOWERWARS: you’re alive?

“We started our campaign, this live series, together in the December ahead of the first instalment of End Genesis III’s release in March last year. Playing again through, in order, Next Genesis I’s instalments and all instalments in the second and third Genesis. Genesis? Geneses? And including the additional content there was for the second and third, and the ‘corrupted’ chapters.”

ChuckleAdder0: to be here to see you do this together, i could :(cry

ChuckleAdder0: honestly i;ve been crying since ‘at last return’

“Don’t cry.” Jevgeni sort of laughed. “Not this soon. We have hours.”

of cralg: december wasn’t the start.

OLAR-AWR: Einar. What’s the matter?

Dutton Catapult: 2028

Dutton Catapult: Since 2028

of craig: first video

“...no... of course,” Jev muttered, following some of the comments. “The start of this campaign. Start of reexperiencing *all* of End Genesis to its completion... with this final instalment. But... yes, we’ve played through each instalment before and uploaded parts.” Another small smile. One more honest. “Those are good memories. The road trip to Ostend to find region-limited physical copies of End Genesis II the week of its European launch.”

Einar remembered a bridge. The calming, expansive view of ocean under sun from his driver’s side. “UK having stopped receiving so much physical media the year before,” Einar either reminded or first informed their late-night audience.

“We played it through together, start to finish, before we uploaded our entire playtime of the second Genesis’s first two instalments. How many hours was it, Ein? Kolmkümmend kaks?”

Not quite thirty-two. “Thirty hours,” Einar memorised, and thought back again to that September and October. To the last few hours of the shared experience. “...put in over two months.” The cinematically dowsed thrills. And the distraction. The omission of any alive strains aggravating at that time in their pasts.

“It took so long. Because, if you’re a similar age or older you’ll know, we could not get online anymore. *Not* at the same time. *Night* shifts. Night shifts, I had. And you, Ein, were the reverse. Which is why we could only log on for short runs.”

“Yeah.” Einar admitted, “It was difficult.” His reflection moved to his past occupation. The work with hands in gloves. The grind, and the literal cold. The slowing time, kept from sunlight.

“It was,” Jevgeni agreed.

Beamerjak9: that;s not whereit started

“...It’s not where it started?” he then read, and repeated.

MMHFC: Asger

Beamerjak9: Player three JES Joined!!

“No,” he considered, “that still isn’t the earliest experience we had with End Genesis. You’re right. You’re right, I was-”

MMHFC: aSGer on the scene.

Beamerjak9: Asger

1BoxTrap: Player three.

“...third controller, mängija er- kolm... three, player three... yes. Infrequently I would be invited to join Einar and yes, his friend, Asger, to play *End*. Original Genesis. I headed round Einar’s after sixth form. They would stop me, from always playing alone.”

1BoxTrap: Now you’ll finish this together.

AlphTrll: GET ASGR BACK FO R THIS

Ail33n: Why did ASGR stop content??

1BoxTrap: YES. Asger back.

Mum’s dining chairs. A monitor mounted on several books on the set of aging wooden drawers. Einar recollected more visuals from his adolescence. He felt again, the rough edges. Rolling thick screws between his fingers. Blisters on his palms, from rope, and from jagged rock. The worst wear, always on his left hand, close to the roots of his fingers. And time to heal, instead spent invested in interstellar combat. Nine o’clock Thursdays. And Fridays. The attention to soreness transferred, to his arse, for sitting for hours on hard cushions on hard surfaces.

He looked at the live footage on the reaction cams. Tried reading the small movements around Jev's mouth as his eyes and nose and short scar above cheek were covered by his headset.

"I'd love to rewatch those old uploads," Jevgeni expressed.

31SamdYER31: content for quest reacts????

"Maybe," he replied to the comment.

01:58:12

This was not a midnight launch. It wasn't, first, because it wasn't midnight. It was a two am GMT release. Second, because this was digital. There was no physical release. There was no line. No amounting queue of sons and fathers, and daughters and fathers, friends and partners coming together. Waiting together. Breathable eagerness, anticipation, and excitement. A stimulating sense of shared interest. Researched and now conversed narrative-focused theories, and the desperation to see if any hold any truth. A boyhood Einar. He was never close to the front, never all the way as far as the back. But he peeked out from wherever he was, to see staff under the cold-lit beams on the other side of the rising shutter and storefront glass.

okarlsaaro: löpetage see koos

GUNN3RII: NIT ready for this

GUNN3RII: NOT*

IMADETOWERWARS: how bit was install?

IMADETOWERWARS: big**

DownToAssassinate: Theories – Does it Start right where 4.3 cut to black?

sonyx: 480gb about.

Einar looked into his front-on camera lens. He then hid his eyes and his attention inside his headset. He outreached an index, and dragged it across his screens...

IMADETOWERWARS: START

GUNN3RII: Okay, Start

GenesisDevil: START

He pressed 'START'.

'START' switched to a loading icon.

Another install bar appeared immediately below the frozen button. This bar appeared to complete much faster than the last. It was completed seconds after initiating.

00 : 00 : 07

A black screen.

ashinama software
presents

00 : 03 : 12

Speaker: A hundred years ago... thoughtless leaders of the final humans lost hold of any control over a future...

The female speaker sounded youthful. She delivered the well-rehearsed exposition, calm, and a second ahead of the provided subtitles.

Speaker: Removing restraints from the early Machines. Allowing their evolution. And their will.

Speaker: In 2202, the Final Humans recruited *Historics*. Humans from past generations. Contacted through Tempus Cables.

Speaker: Connected and inputted in armed machine frames.

Speaker: To serve in a war, hoping to save a future that existed long after their passing.

“They’re talking about us,” Jevgeni said, half teasing.

Speaker: 2206, war began. Humans acted, to end the evolution of Machine.

Speaker: The *End Genesis* wars were eleven years on Terra and in its atmosphere.

Speaker: While they entered End Genesis at nine billion, by 2217 Humans were reduced to nine hundred thousand.

Speaker: Seven hundred thousand accounted for, retreated to platforms orbiting Luna, Phobos and Ares.

Speaker: They regrouped. Rebuilt. Produced. Survived.

Speaker: Then they returned. Home. To Terra. End Genesis was not over. They felt prepared now to defeat the Machines.

Speaker: One final effort. Reclaim home. Or meet extinction.

Jevgeni muttered again, “By the hand of their own creation.”
The speaker narrated nothing more.

END GENESIS
IIII.IIII

“Okay,” Einar reacted, sounding unsteady, rather than prepared.

“Okay?”

“Interesting. That summarisation... caught us up more to the first instalment of Genesis Four. Returning for one final effort. Not to where we are in the fight long after returning to Earth. Where instalment three closed.”

00 : 06 : 53

Perfect circles. Colossal rings of angelic-aesthetic science fiction architecture were battered with splitting fractures and enormous scorches. Collapse ruined spires. Evolved schools, and courts, and homes and places of work and prayer were grounded or buried. Bloated funnels of dark smoke trailed slow drifting and descending interstellar vessels beaten in warfare.

It was a skybox near identical to that featured on the cover. Far more climatic to experience in play.

From the half-caved rooftop, Mosgroa, Fleet Commander of the remaining Sera-Yance ships, held his bruised eyes out toward the destruction. He stood, turned away from fellow Final Human terra-retakers and historics, and few of the lost dragged to cover and covered under torn rags. His heavy-set, fragmented, colourless armour had sunken from his under-layered, special rubber suited shoulders. It'd all taken more damage since he was last seen in the previous instalment. His helmet had gone.

'I'll send the direction quietly, over Sera-Yance comm,' he spoke to the heartbreaking view, 'they'll separate from the rest of our retakers. Make no distraction to the fight.'

'They understand it's necessary.'

Einar turned his actual head reactive to the reply played louder in his left ear. His 'frame's in game perspective tracked.

Lieutenant Fivad stood beside him, facing Mosgroa. Her jaw was speckled with dry blooded scrapes, lined with fresh cuts and near decade old scars.

'They understand it's necessary...' Mosgroa repeated. 'And that it's time.' He turned, faced Fivad and opened his pose, 'We'll see each other again. Up there... somewhere unknown.'

Fivad accepted the fleet commander's embrace.

Mosgroa rested his battered chin on her plated shoulder. '...or home.'

'Do you believe that?'

'I want to,' he spoke into her ear.

Fivad's sentiment weakened Mosgroa's HP. She slipped away a few centimetres from the goodbye then held on, hard gripping his upper arm, 'Set a longer course on navigation for the Sera-Ys toward diversion coordinates. Tell them over comm to ignore that course and to hear under cover and through structure, and direct...' She let go. 'I'm starting to understand the Machines accessed our navigation.'

Mosgroa gripped Fivad's arm as well, 'End it, Fi.'

She nodded, 'I'm ending it.'

'Historic,' Mosgroa turned to Einar's frame, eye-to-eye with his view, 'This isn't yours or your children's or children's children's war. Know that fighting with us, risking the destruction of your own mind, for *us*... it'll never be forgotten.' He pressed on the frame's shoulder and Einar's keyboard lightly vibrated.

Wildbeastcollectors00: Fivad HOT

Wildbeastcollectors00: she lOOKing better every .instalment

555: sweatty

Retakers took shelter inside ruined receptions, box homes, offices. Their noses, eyes, ears, and upwards, like Einar and Jevgeni in real life, were covered. Fastened inside helmets. Hidden beneath advanced technology. Externally visorless headsets. The designs of the Retakers' were far more science fiction than that of their VRs. They were headdresses, made of fictional metal and other new materials discovered from Terra-nearing meteorite. Effective head protection which advanced sight with targeting and HUDs and differently, were only one part of the incredibly conceptual design unique to End Genesis.

"The Seras fleet, do they have to survive inside their ships? Where else do they go? If you weren't here for our stream of the last lost chapter, you learn that Luna-Keely- the platform orbiting the moon, is destroyed. There's NEWDAY Phobos still... as far as we know, but it was said in instalment one that the Final Humans could not return to any of the platforms once they returned to Earth for this last attempt at ending End Genesis." Jev paused. "Do you think they'll reveal there is still somewhere else?"

OLAR-AWR: Einar.
ANNIANIT: KTM
ANNIANIT: KTM KTM KTM

"Maybe this'll end with the fleet in space," Einar theorised, "Headed toward somewhere new. To start again."

"I guess, if we don't win."

spectatorKieron: KTM!
MashedPotarto: Don't die/

"Can't die," Jev said, as the comment appeared inside their goggled visuals. "Should've said. If you could not tell, we've been set to *teamset*, *highest* difficulty mode, permadeath. Meaning if we both 'fall' and can't revive each other, we start again from the beginning of the instalment. Which, right now, would be only losing half hour of progress."

"But as well... on top of that, we agreed that if we are to start again... we minus o-currency, offering even more of our earnings to Ashinama."

"Right. Yes. But we are not stopping-"

spectatorKieron: thait is fuckn sick
MOnach: How much?
MashedPotarto: oh SHIT. Yeah, really don't die//

"What- What did we agree? A third of the instalment price each restart? We are not stopping now until this is finished. And if that means staying live on Upstream until morning, or even for days, so be it."

32CRUSH: 25 £s in o-c every death.

01:02:46

Fivad breathed deep. In and out.

Decapitated Machines were scattered over broken stone and concrete. Chests were ripped through with electromagnetic-projected rail shots. Limbs whole punched and cables, cores, circuits ripped through with piercing ammunition.

Jevgeni's frame scavenged for parts. He stole undamaged batteries and charge and refuelled his own loadout which was running low from excessive use and a reluctance to switch it out for other arms.

'They look to change offence,' a retaker communicated.

'Rather, to cancel offence,' Fivad answered. 'They're moving away from us, they're leaving. They're down to fewer MINDs. Like us, because they *learned* from us, if this is their end they must save what remains.'

'Moving the remaining MINDs off the surface-'

'Onto carriers,' Fivad realised. 'We need to prevent their exit. If they escape the system, they'll rebuild, too.'

PEkit: ...and this'll all have been for nothing...

AHIGHERform: Machine= little bitch

ANNIANIT: KTM

0784974: KTM

'I'll lead few of us higher,' Fivad decided, speaking with her helmet equipped, 'We'll search for ships still operational to sever them if any MINDs reach atmosphere.'

"Are we going with her?" Jev asked. "One or both of us-?"

'Historics, the rest of us, stay together.'

"I think we're both staying on the ground," Einar answered Jev.

'...Overseers' are sending markers to navigation for where they estimate the MINDs are. Without Seras, we are fewer. Though, that means we are also faster. It matters less if the Machines see our markers, you'll reach the MINDs before they travel far. Together, understand?' she confronted Jevgeni, 'Rush one location at a time'.

AHIGHERform: KILL THE MINDS. KILL THE MACHINES.

"Time to clear the MIND," Jev punned.

01 : 44 : 57

AHIGHERform: KTM

NEWedd 000: give it a rest..

Altrusnic: fuckinn ktm shut the fuck up making this about that shit. its not about that shit.

Angelala: shtthefuckup

Einar tapped an arrow key repeatedly, scanning through available attachments for his rifle at the makeshift checkpoint. He compared improvements each made to the rifle's fire rate and accuracy.

Jev's frame was kneeling. He took one hand off his weapon, rested it instead on his chest. This was one of several animations resultant of player inactivity.

Einar could hear clicking through his headphones.

Notabot: mot-assisted scope was OP in EGIII
TakeoutBoot: Wil this be last stream?
OLAR-AWR: Einar, what's the matter?
RegularExp0ctation: KTM
SREAUtd: shit. last stream pha rel?
Compooter: this is your last stream?
AHIGHERform: QUEST!, no timeto jerk off now
Notabot: fuck ff
Arachnid: were you not going to tell us?
Compooter: keepn it until the end.
Angelala: take your KTM off the stream

The constant barrage of comments blocked Einar's view of certain weapon stats. He couldn't track the ten-to-fifteen percent differences in accuracy and recoil.

"This is our last stream," he answered. "The series would always finish with this last instalment..."

Notabot: They're not being subtle about it.
54325: what are they not telling us?

02 : 03 : 20

Genegisation: why's the print down?
GUNN3RII: How long is the last instalment....??

"Jev, you want to take all the heavy ammunition, focus on the MIND's armour, I'll take mags and pull the Machines to me. They'll probably keep rushing in from the side street until the MIND's destroyed."

FireCLoud92: pst'END GENESIS IIII dev confirms 'last instalment in series' IIII-III to be one of longest'.

Jev mounted an LMG onto a low stone wall and fired ceaselessly at two close fractions of the enormous plating defending the MIND's underneath servers. "I'm not sure I'm doing any damage," he noted.

Einar switched his attention from infantry Machines, to assess the MIND. "Try explosives first. Hit it with the LMG in the weak spots they create." He reloaded just fast enough to fire back again before a third shot to frame would've cleaned his shield. "We destroyed one before. Took some time, they go down slow."

"It's going down too slow, Ein, ammunition is very low."

"Check the belts on the Retakers if anymore have gone down."

Angelala: SQUAD LEADERS. When you're low on amm some will spawn on them and you can take it out their
Angelala: packs

Genegisation: Anyone notice the print's not on the wall???? Is that intentional??

"Sq- Squad leaders, is that true? Thank you." Jev scanned the rifle-firing Retakers behind the dotted cover in his proximity. He searched for identifying details in their design. "Is there something else we're supposed to use?"

3691: Farm machines. Gotta be dropping x12s and x36s everyone that TTP kills

02 : 47 : 41

Without sight of the real world, Einar took his hand off his mouse and finished off his fifth bottle, barely tasting the last sip. The tipsiness might have intensified his reactions to the fight and to the blockbuster drama, but it, unfortunately, did nothing for his physical discomfort.

He targeted down the modded scope on his rifle, lined up the sights with a Machine when the framerate drastically dropped. He lifted his middle finger off the mouse. His display inside the headset was unresponsive. The perspective remained extended by the scope. In his sights, rubble rested on the terrain, the light, and the terra-capturing Machines had all stopped.

JevQuest left

The audio went on without the visual. A repetition of gunfire, alarms, failing star-crossing engines.

Einar could not stop it. He couldn't pause the game. The menu wasn't appearing as it should when he pressed the escape key. Although, even if it had, it was unable to hold the action. Online cooperative on all End Genesis's ran on online servers.

Angelala: Shit. Einar don't disconnect.
0784974: bad server.
0784974: weak shit man

"Jev? Jev? You there still?" Einar kept his headset on instead of taking it off to check Jevgeni's state on Upstream.

"-re you there, Einar?"

"I'm here. Got audio still, but my screen's frozen."

"It hasn't gone black?"

"No," he was relieved to share. "Have you disconnected? It said you left-"

"Starting back up. Don't- *fuck*, don't leave." Jev cleared his throat. "Fuck. Stay down, keep in cover, I'll join back."

"I can't do anything right now." Einar thought he felt his heart beating heavier. "I'm stuck. I can't see if I'm behind cover."

"You're screen's frozen on the stream."

Still, he kept his headset pulled over his sight. Hurting, tired, washed, Einar stared at the illuminated stuck image. The Machine slightly off from his crosshairs. The appearing comments active in the bottom left corner...

5232: potato connection
ZavirMan: HTFU jev.
OLAR-AWR: Einar.
0482382: KTM
OLAR-AWR: What's the matter, Einar?
RyanHotSauce: |||||

Einar hit a key, muting his own mic on Upstream. “Jev, can you block comments?”

“Hold on...” Einar expected Jev was now muting his microphone feed to Upstream as well. “I can turn off the comments,” he understood.

“Can you stop one spectator? You should be able to change their-”

“Let me check.”

Angelala: what?

0784974: muted.

Untron: I can't hear 0000

93212052: TTPs muted mic...

“Please stop OLAR-AWR commenting.”

Audio through End Genesis quietened. Less gunfire ran from the headphones into Einar's ears.

“Done. I booted them from the stream. Easier. Couldn't find the- What- I didn't see, what were they commenting? ML Border?”

Einar decided not to answer.

“Are you still frozen?”

He unmuted his microphone. Full attendance could hear him again. “Still frozen.”

“Shit. Should I rejoin? Or should I wait until you're not jammed?”

“Rejoin,” Einar suggested. “In case I go down.” Was it over, he still wondered. Was it time to start again, reset after almost three hours of focus and discomfort. “I still have audio. Some audio.”

Untron: AI MR... Someone, please

823124: Mouthreader*

991013: PSTplease stop collar 8 double are commented

IDIDIT: ??

Untron: ????

53262: PSTbooted tim/him/them from the team/string--

991013: PSTcommenting. Emel border?

Mmilan: Is this what they said while muted?!

No distraction from it, Einar read every comment, the pasted AI translations, as they popped up in the corner.

IDIDIT: who's speaking???

4323: PSTI didn't see what were they comment tin. ML border

Greennight0: quest

Jakobbb33: PSTPSTcollar 8 double are commented-- ??

Greennight0: & jev

823124: OLAR-AWR*

“I'm in. I'm in, Einar, it's loaded me in. I've rejoined our session, the one you're in. Where are- Oh, you're there. You're not moving, Ein, but you're behind cover. Are you still stuck?”

“Still can't do anything.”

“Okay, but you can leave now. If you leave, we shouldn't lose progress now. Long as I don't go down.”

Einar reset. He kicked his PC out of End Genesis.

Greennight0: ML Border
53892: Definitely ssaid ML Border

As the visual inside of his headset cut to a total black screen, he pushed the headset up to a resting point on his forehead and at last checked the scene on his monitors. He saw on the third reaction cam, that Jev's headset was back on now.

53221: PSTOLAR-AWR: What's the matter, Einar?
Mmilan: ooohh
53221: PSTOLAR-AWR: Einar
93212052: PSTOLAR-AWR: Einar, what's the matter?
Greennight0: Wha's going on????
Mmilan: Why did you remove them?
Trenchess: What's the matter with that
Holytail98: ML? politicallll
Holytail98: llllll
Rednight: ye
Rednight: contra
75643212: what's thematter
Rednight: vertical
Rednight: versial*
Mmilan: if I ask what's the matter, I get botted?
Rednight: booted*

Jev submitted. "Yes, I said ML Border."

It stunned Einar, Jev's admittance. "Jev," he sought to try to warn him.

Microsteeve: probably.
ThirtyXs: What's the matter, Einar?

"Einar?"
"Jev."

04222325: Whats tha matter?
ThirtyXs: Ein?
Yourmother12: ein ein ein ein ein
Angelala: Guys, he's from Denmark.. what do you think is the fucking matter?
Mmilan: he's northern European
ThirtyXs: other side
04222325: Where re you from Mmilan
ANNIANIT: so KTM?
04222325: Einar.

White, scrubbing waves washed over black sand, rock and annihilated fragments of a carrier. Skyline of the city half stood in the distance. The main menu lapped and waited for Einar to press 'any button'. Instead, though, he took another route, joining Jev's session through a popup menu to the side. The scene faded gradually, turned to another now unnerving black screen. What, however, remained was a futuristic circuit board, appearing in the centre. It rotated. Few words were etched into its data.

"Do not make this political," Jev commanded, yet lacking enthusiasm.

The circuit board continued to rotate.

"Who're you talking to?" Einar asked.

“To them.”

Yourmother12: us?

ThirtyXs: you're both NE.

AHIGHERform: then KTM, right?

Holytail98: Us??? look at what you'er steraming right now?

03 : 21 : 12

AIHIGHERform: EINAR son of EMIL JORGENSEN

Holytail98: Einar Jorgensen?

68213: Pro OM

Enormous parts of its armour were dented, shot and melted through. The MIND's servers beneath strained, heating rapidly. It ticked over to complete destruction, exploding, throwing armour into pillars and pavement.

Battling Machines, all at once, dropped to the ground. Lights out, powering down. No intelligence left inside from transfer. Mixed patterns of oil and white fluid spilled from well-placed bullet holes.

‘Mosgroa made it.’ Fivad came through on comms. ‘Most Seras still alive when he delivered the order got off the surface. If we lose here, Terra Retakers, Historics... know that the Seras keep us in existence. Out there.’ The connection jittered. ‘I see Machines here, dropping without exterior damage. My estimation's the fourth MIND is down.’

“Not all the Machines shut off,” Jev realised.

‘We're not done yet,’ Fivad then confirmed. ‘Set an LZ, Historics. Light a flare. The last MIND made it to a take-off.’ She sounded exhausted. ‘We're almost there.’

“Yes, leader,” Jev answered. His frame halted. The miniature icon appeared on his frames visor indicating to Einar, that he had opened his map. “There's no marker on the map. Should we be choosing an LZ? There's a- There's a wide area not very far from here. And there is cover from surrounding structures, if they are still standing.”

“Mark it up.”

53320: PSTHvad er der I vejen, Einar?

“Der er ikke noget galt,” Einar replied, quietly.

03 : 48 : 45

The last MIND ascended. In a slow, veering shuttle, it rose above the remaining highest structures, the dashes and long reaches of vibrantly sunseting beams.

Jevgeni revived Einar, holding ‘E’, injecting healer into his collar.

Surrounding Machines advanced, cornering their holding position. But they started to move slower. As they were forced a further distance from the rising MIND, their last connection to consciousness, they were becoming less functional. Restricted to stiff movements. Basic motions.

31SamdYER31: kill every last child-pusher

72OAKTREE: So close.
Markist: INGAME CUT INCOMING

Their flare memorialised the section of gameplay with an electric blue cloud. Screenshots from this section would likely be pasted into more than a handful of online reviews, articles, and social media posts.

Jev recovered. His frame climbed back to his feet when a fast flash of white surprised Einar. The accompanying sound flew across one headphone to the other as the charged shot blew through his armour, skin, then muscle.

“No!” Jev yelled.

Markist: scripted
Elfonte53: WOAHH
Wildbeastcollectors00: noooooooooooooo
Wildbeastcollectors00: ooooooo
Elfonte53: shit.
Wildbeastcollectors00: not this close

“Oh, fuck- I can’t get- I can’t revive you. It’s not doing anything when I press it. I’m taking damage. I’m going to go down, too, if I don’t-”

“No, get down,” Einar shouted. “Get down, in case it isn’t- I think it’s scripted.”

Roars of an overworking engine erupted. The noise of Retakers fired rounds doubled. Holes through Machines’ cores appeared before they dropped. On the ground, Einar attempted to turn his frame’s view, to work out what was happening when Fivad and two Retakers moved into view. They fought back. Taking cover as a third Retaker grabbed Einar’s frame by a strap wrapped across his chest and dragged him away from the fight. As Einar’s frame was forcibly removed, Jev held the line with Fivad, unloading ammunition into Machines. Einar fired his sidearm until the secondary weapon dropped, and he was pulled aboard a ship.

“We’re clear. I’m on the ship, Jev.”

Jev continued firing. He must’ve needed to reload.

“Jev?”

Sound of the ship’s engines looped. Literally looped. A short track of the same audio restarting every four to five actual seconds. The rising blue wasn’t rising. The rising shuttle wasn’t rising.

Einar left his headset on. “Jev?” The trapped sounds of fuel burning began to delude. Distortion became rhythmic to his ears.

ANNIANIT: machines are fucking with you
Uglybaby8: They don’t like Nes
Apri7l: Perfect time to tell us what’s the matter/...

“Jev?”

64282: what is the matter, Einar?

↓3011 ↓3001

“You want to know what’s wrong?” Einar asked.

Beamerjak9: Yeag
64282: Yes
Apri7l: YESSSS
Fuckovf: For real?
Milkshak3: Ja.

Einar felt vulnerable to Machine, but he did what he could to have hope that he was protected from the ones frozen in sight. He took his hands off his keyboard and mouse and stood up. He gripped his long sleeve top, held the seam and pulled it up enough to unveil a good stretch of bare lower torso. With his headset still on, and wires running down his side from ear to close to his collar, he adjusted, intending to catch different light. To highlight the severity of the damage done to his body. “I have rib fractures. I am in a lot of pain.” The white neon emboldened the engulfing black bruising. “If teamset permadeath wasn’t difficult enough on its own.”

“Einar? What are- Why are you showing us?”

“They wanted to know what the matter is. This is the matter.”

64282: Looks mean

“It is mean,” he assured.

“What’s happening?” Jev spoke, with something caught in his throat. “Are you frozen again?”

“Yes. Chilling on the ship.”

“Stay in. I’ll load back in again.”

64282: A Machine push you too?
Mmilan: What did you do?
Fuckovf: makeup for^^

“Lupus.”

GUNN3RII: Were you pushed too

“L- Lupus street. You might’ve seen what happened in the news. It was several weeks ago. It’s not what I was doing.” Einar held his top up still. “It really wasn’t, I’m not just saying it, it wasn’t important. I was walking, was doing nothing unordinary and you know, the four-by-four drove onto the pavement.”

“Ein, you don’t have to identify yourself to thousands of people.”

“It’s okay,” he said. And it felt okay. Though, that might’ve been the inebriation’s influence. “Are you back?”

“I’m in.”

Einar let go of his top. The thin material fell over his blackened stomach. He cautiously descended back to his desk chair. “I had headphones on.” He closed Genesis again. “I hear nothing but my music, then I’m hit.” The screen went black. “It felt numb. And then this ultimate sensation of pain is over most of my body. I don’t remember what I saw. It was over when it started. If you haven’t been hit by a big car, this was my perspective, I

was moving fast. I was held onto the front of the car, with another person as well.” He launched IIII.IIII. Waited for the main menu. “We were pushed into each other. I was a little under their leg and I had one of their arms in my face, I remember. You see the injuries. We both sustained injuries. The woman who was struck, her wrist was broken. She suffered a concussion as well.” White, scrubbing waves washed over black sand, rock and annihilated fragments of a carrier. “This was not political.” Skyline of the city half stood in the distance. “If you’ve followed what’s been publicly discussed about this runover, it says it was targeted. The driver went for OM protestors. I was close enough to this, to know that is lies, and the driver instead suffered with instability. A mental challenge. He drove off of the road in a frantic reaction to feeling the world is more and more out of control.”

Fuckovf: too loose

“Changing for the worse.” The sand drifted. Rocks, and the waves faded to black, and Einar loaded into their latest progress. “Neither is this stream political. We’re not stupid... but subject matter *aside*, End Genesis was and has still been our favourite telling of fiction. It has been with us since our childhoods, and simultaneously, it is our most popular content to release.”

“It really fucking is,” Jev reacted.

“This is not a statement... nor a suggestion, about our stance on the current protests or the new Machine Legislation. And this is our last stream. Quest could carry on, that’ll be up to him, and I support him whatever he decides, but I’ll not be continuing with content. I’m leaving London and yes, returning to Northern Europe. My father, who’s not Emil Jorgensen, needs care and he’s prevented now from entering the UK. And I am aware of the incoming bias in opportunities I might’ve had if I were to remain here.”

04 : 11 : 03

‘This is all we have!’ the pilot cried.

Fivad gripped a rail overhead inside the cargo hold of the bulleting ship. She eyed through to the cockpit and out the front visor, towards the carrier escaping the atmosphere with the very last of the Machine’s MINDs onboard. ‘It has to be more!’

‘It isn’t- There isn’t,’ the pilot knew, ‘I’m sorry, Leader.’

‘Stay on it,’ she commanded.

‘We’ll come apart leaving atmos.’

‘We have the fuel?’

‘Yes, we do. What does it matter?’

Constant upwards thrust rattled the short interior and Einar’s frame as well as his keyboard and mouse.

Fivad stared for longer forward. There was a pause before she glanced over her own shoulder at the growing drop to Terra’s ground floor. She turned to Einar, Jevgeni, then to the pilot, ‘If we sent a message, would it reach Mosgroa?’

‘I- I don’t know.’

‘Fuck, I think I know what she’s doing,’ Jev uttered.

‘Is there a chance?’ she asked.

‘Yes. The shorter the message is-’

‘*Reclamation*. Send it. Send the one word.’

‘We haven’t finished this, Leader,’ a Retaker beside Jev in the cargo feared. ‘Are you sure- If this isn’t over-?’

‘We can finish this,’ Fivad announced, assured. ‘But it means this is the end as well, for the last few of us here.’ Fivad looked to Einar again.

‘Message sent’, the pilot called back.

‘Unplug, Historic.’ She put a hand on Einar’s shoulder. ‘You are not Icarus. Only we were.’ She let go. ‘Betam, pull all power to thrust. Drive us into the carrier.’

64282: I found Asger.

‘We all go together.’

64282: I found Asger!

Fuckovf: Wait. What?

Imerit: Really???

Ihatedsch00l: Was he missing

Imerit: Why’s he not here for the ending????

64282: He;s dead

Comment deleted.

“Jev?”

Imerit: He’s dead?

MagicStick1-32: Yo, ASGER;s dead??

Mmilan: WTAF

HumanF8rt: Machines I’m telling you

“No... No, I’m done, Einar. We’re done. Einar, switch it off. Turn the stream off.”

“It’s fine, Jev. It’s not news.”

“But it isn’t fine. This is awful. You’ve bared enough. This isn’t how we finish this.”

MagicStick1-32: For those to who it is news You going to tell us what happened?

“I’m off, Einar.”

“What? Are you-?”

“I’m offline. I’ve turned off the stream, closed Upstream.”

“We’re four hours in. I leave very soon, Jev, I don’t know whether I’ll have another chance to get through this before I go, if we don’t finish it now.”

“No, I’m not quitting. We don’t quit Genesis, we go off stream.”

“Jev, we’re drawing more attention t-”

“I’m already off. And we resume and can just finish it together without all the shit. This is it. This is the very end of it. Of such a big thing- a thing in our lives and we should be taking it in. I want this to be the one place where I have to offer no attention to how fucked

the world is getting if I can't have any other." Jev paused. "Get offline, Einar. Fuck them. Close it. Fivad is waiting." He paused again. "Please."

↑3300 ↑3304

The comments hadn't let up. Lots more numbers, 'llll's, all caps locked, question marks, KTMs, NEs, and 'Asger' comment-by-comment respected then trolled then remembered. His closest friend from childhood referenced as nothing more than something that only existed in poorly recorded reaction videos.

Einar took his headset off. He freed his straining eyes for the moment. Moved his finger to Upstream...

↓0

XX LIVE SESSION ENDED XX

"Please, Einar."

"It's done."

"You're offline?"

"Yeah." Einar had closed Upstream entirely. He no longer had a view of Jevgeni's reaction cam, yet he could envisage the small smirk likely to be on his face.

04 : 16 : 01

Fivad reached again, to hold onto the overhead rail. She watched the Machines' carrier failing to outrun their advancing ship. It was seconds before volatile contact.

Einar expected one final sentence from Fivad, bidding farewell.

The screen went white. All audio stopped. Disappeared.

ashinama software
presents

Einar put his phone face down on the stumped chest of two drawers beside his single bed and moved up to the far end to dedicate the entirety of his focus on the twenty-two-inch monitor ambitiously balanced on an opposing, forward bowing shelf.

END GENESIS II

Asger held his phone landscape, taking a photo of the onscreen title.

"What's the time?" Jev asked.

“Four,” Einar felt sure, having checked his screen only a minute ago.

“Ein, I can’t explain how excited I am right now. In this moment.”

Made up of digital paintbrush artwork and computer graphics, a fleet of enormous Retaker ships levitated, still, above an incredible carpet of clouds. A close to breaking atmosphere sky, illuminated by pale sunrise. Smaller shuttles and Final Human piloted drones crossed the scene offering some animation while a calm and familiar electronically infused orchestral score played. The game, and Asger and Jev, waited for Einar to press ‘any button’.

Campaign
re.occurrence
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