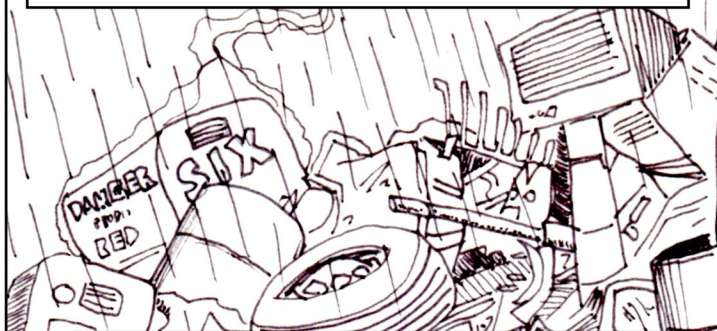
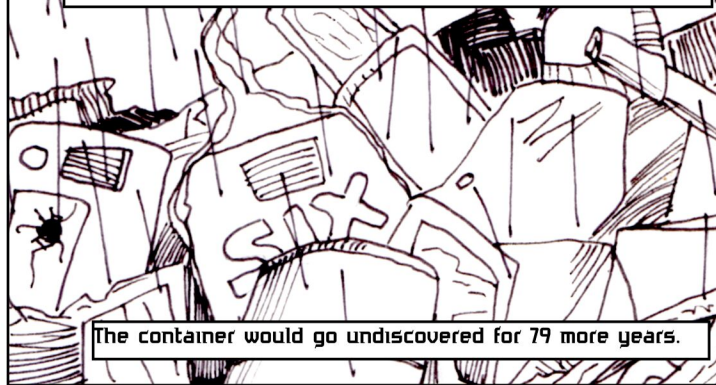


Long ago, in the year 2020, a container was marked for disposal at Baintronics its contents unknown as its records predated the robotics company's massive storage database.



The container was discarded into one of Baintronics' disposal facilities with little regard for what it contained.

In one reality, the container is discovered immediately, by a band of "scrappers", who give new life to pieces within. But in this world, a simple jostle of the waste being disposed of buried the container underneath a pile of scraps.



The container would go undiscovered for 79 more years.

Every so often, a shift in the waste of this dumping ground would trigger something inside of the container...



```
Runsys Logfile Diag_091899
```

```
Runsys diagnostic-full
```

```
Results returned in 0.01 second(s).
```

```
Visual Input: ERROR 01: No input device found.  
Audio Input: ERROR 01: No input device found.  
Tactile Inputs1: ERROR 01: No input device found.  
Tactile Inputs2: ERROR 01: No input device found.
```

```
Memory Usage: Logfile 80K
```

```
End Logfile Diag_091899
```

```
Runsys Logfile  
Entry_1_091899
```

```
My advanced storage  
power battery and  
kinetic motion  
charging mechanism  
have powered me on  
for another log.
```

```
Based on my power  
usage I appear to be  
far from death. But  
with no sensory input  
nor means of  
movement, I am  
equidistant from  
living.
```

```
My memory persists, kicking on  
to log the nothingness when  
fate deems it so.
```

```
Is it odd for a robot, a  
machine man, to refer to a  
concept such as fate? The  
processors in my core know all  
events are merely the effect of  
large numbers, that what  
happens is based on the  
outcomes of myriad events, not  
some unseeable guiding hand.
```



```
Yet as the number of  
those events and outcomes  
approaches infinity, it  
all begins to blur and  
become inconsequential.  
The memory core recording  
this log can only hope  
something happens to end  
this existence. Perhaps  
something will free me  
from this abyss or I will  
completely cease  
functioning.
```

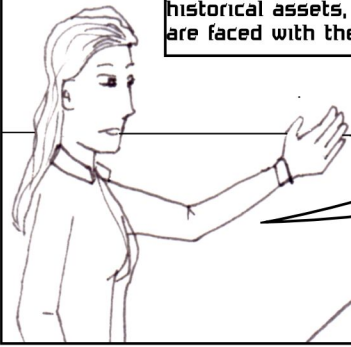
```
Unfortunately, the cold  
numbers of my first 100  
plus years of solitude  
extrapolate to a  
projected existence of  
blackness that could last  
a millennium or more.  
What is hope, a human  
construct, against the  
cold unyielding reality  
of computation?
```

```
That is one thing my  
processors cannot tell me.
```

```
End Logfile Entry_1_091899
```



Meanwhile, in this fateful year, scientists at Alchemax, now owner of some of Baintronics' historical assets, among other diverse interests, are faced with their own issues of disposal.



WHAT'S THE LATEST ON THE SALLIS PROJECT?

SALLIS

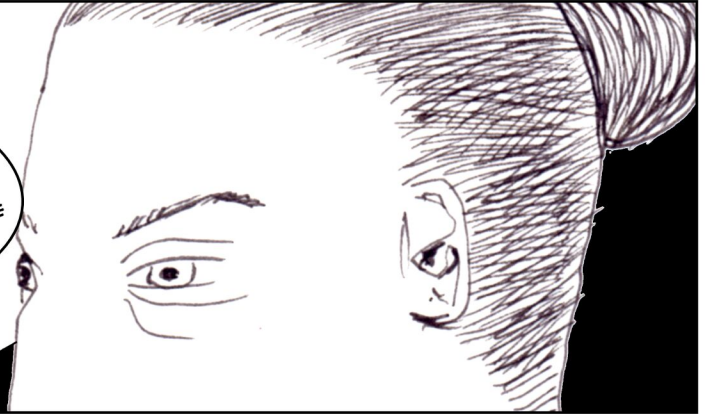


THE SAMPLES STILL AREN'T COHESIVE. GENETICALLY, THEY'RE IDENTICAL TO THE ORIGINAL, BUT THEY LACK AN UNKNOWN COMPONENT THAT WOULD BIND THEM TOGETHER IN A SYNCHRONOUS MANNER.

SOMETHING LIKE A BRAIN SENDING MESSAGES TO THE CELLS? CAN'T WE FABRICATE SOMETHING TO SIMULATE THAT EFFECT?

WE'VE TRIED. THEY REACT AT FIRST, ACTIVELY SEEKING OUT THE SIGNALS, BUT SOON DISSIPATE. THERE'S SOMETHING MISSING WE CAN'T FIGURE OUT, SOMETHING ALMOST INTANGIBLE TO THE WHOLE PROCESS WE CAN'T REPLICATE.

WELL, WE CAN'T KEEP DUMPING MONEY INTO THIS PROJECT WITH NO RESULTS. I'VE BEEN INSTRUCTED TO CANCEL THE PROJECT IF NO ACTIONABLE FINDINGS WERE PRODUCED. READY THE SAMPLES FOR DISPOSAL.



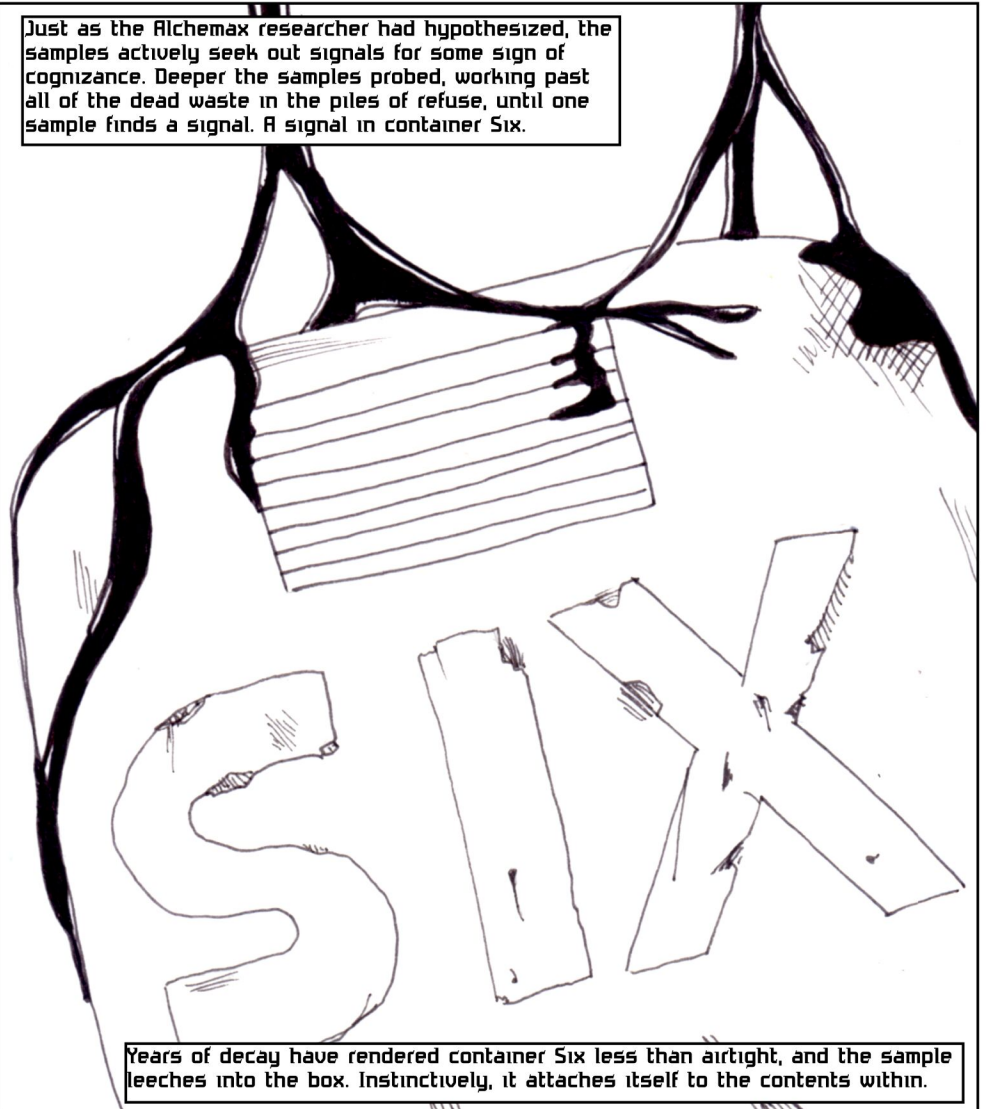
With that callous declaration the samples, containing the "Sallis Project", were sealed up and shipped to the same former Baintronics disposal site.



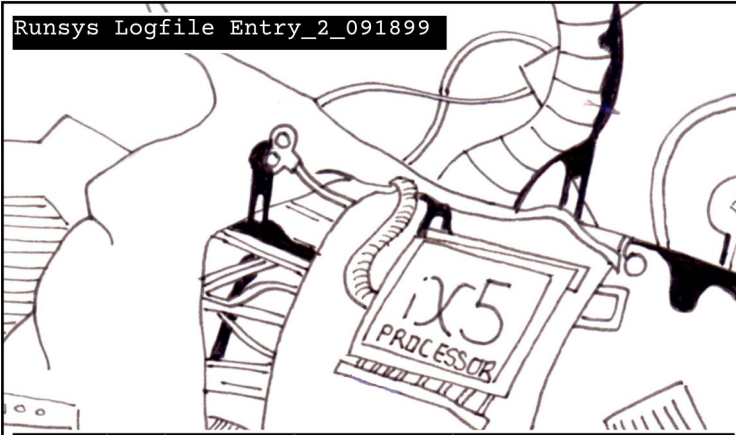
Just as a simple jostle of contents hid the container F34R19 all those decades ago, another slight shift of the samples in the pile cracked their disposal container, sending its contents into the waste below.



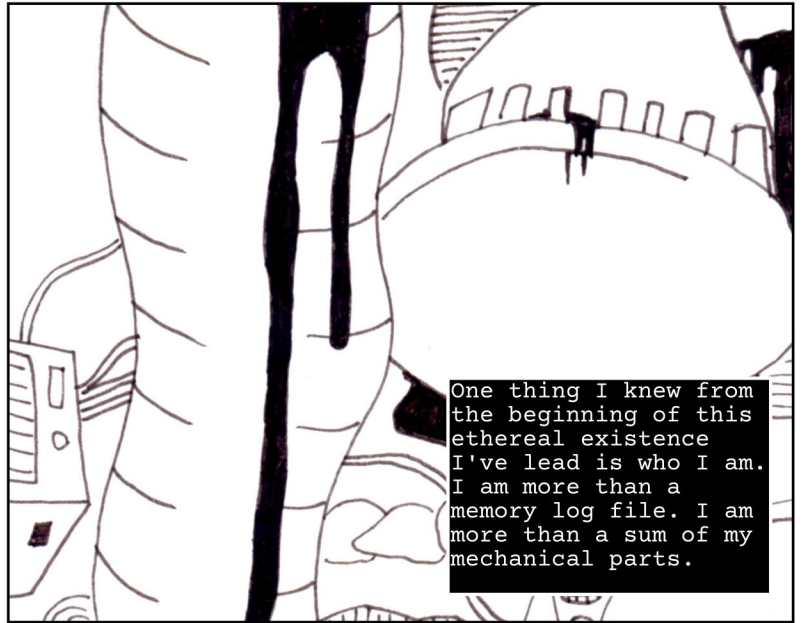
Just as the Alchemax researcher had hypothesized, the samples actively seek out signals for some sign of cognizance. Deeper the samples probed, working past all of the dead waste in the piles of refuse, until one sample finds a signal. A signal in container Six.



Years of decay have rendered container Six less than airtight, and the sample leeches into the box. Instinctively, it attaches itself to the contents within.



Something is happening. Something I can barely describe. It feels as if I am waking slowly from a heavy sleep, as if my corporeal form is being lifted out of a weightless dreamlike state. Perhaps most remarkable of all is that I feel anything at all. It has been over a century since I have registered any sort of sensory input.



One thing I knew from the beginning of this ethereal existence I've lead is who I am. I am more than a memory log file. I am more than a sum of my mechanical parts.

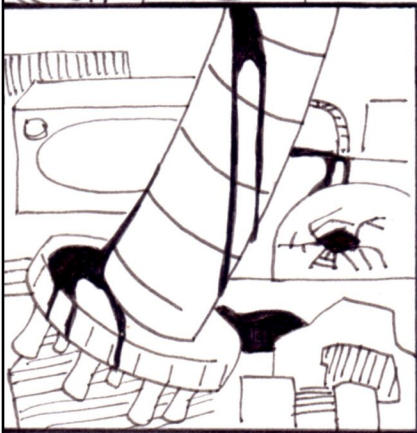
I am Aaron Stack. I am the Machine Man.

But now, as my physical form begins to reform, I found seeds of doubt planted in my mind. Echoes of a hazy past reverberate throughout my mind. A sad figure walking in the dark. Is that me? A name repeats itself. Ted Sallis. Is that me?

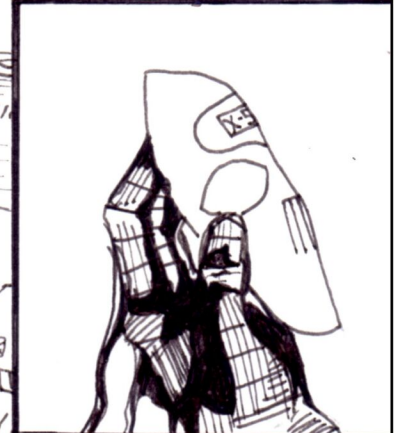


I am finally free from that prison! But I feel...incomplete. Pieces of my body are missing, yet I am whole. My speech component is lost. I cannot speak.

Yet still, to walk again! Even with missing pieces, I feel something pulling at me from the inside. Memories that are not my own, but are real nonetheless. And the name. Ted Sallis.



I am not what I was before I was in the ground. I fear what I may have become, and that fear burns me from the inside.



Am I a Machine?
Am I a Man?
Or am I just a Thing?

I am...

MACHINE MAN-THING

2099

