

# The Frame

By Josh Smith

A wire frame in the shape of a man was left to rust within the confines of a cold, metal chair. Although the chair was equipped with wheels, The Frame's fundamental moving parts were corroded by years of neglect, leaving It stationary. Nothing more than a forgotten piece of furniture.

Its upper casing held a crack and perpetually trickled a thick fluid that gathered in puddles on the floor. The casing also housed two trembling orbs that recorded intermittent waves of passing shapes and colors. The Frame often directed these orbs to the faded blue garments of the caretakers, which seemed to glow against achromatic walls. The flashes of blue circled the room, constantly tracked by the orbs, distributing pills and commands to the fidgeting collections of yellow-clad occupants.

Occupants who penetrated The Frame's exterior with sharp glances and tremulous gestures. An occupant who, like The Frame, was tucked into an anonymous corner. Bound to the spot by the tall, steel rack from which it dangled, a knotted pouch of skin with swaying extremities, its deflated head bobbing as if by force of electric pulse. Another occupant who would put his eternal march around the borders of the room on hold, just to pause in front of The Frame, exposing his chest and the gaping hole that began at the base of his neck and spread down the length and width of his ribcage. Rimmed with freshly coagulated blood, this opening revealed that his trachea and both lungs were removed. The quick sparkle that graced his eyes marked the time that passed before his shirt was properly adjusted and he was once again traveling the predestined rectangular road from which he never strayed.

Following the activities of these occupants and their caretakers, It noticed the medication rounds occurred at scheduled times. They fit a pattern. It appeared as if each motion – from the twitch of an arm to the herding of irrational cattle to their sterile feeding grounds – revolved with utmost precision around a singular clock. The pacing occupant marked off disjointed seconds with each step. The Frame absorbed the depths of time, realizing much of it had been lost in medicated haze.

The syncopation of events pumped distant, yet familiar images through The Frame and out into the room. Images flashed into sounds carrying the scent of textured phrases. It was once again able to hear the hum of mechanical apparatus that never ceased to spin behind Its orbs.

This noise gave rise to an assemblage of palpitating colors and shapes that began to encircle The Frame. They synthesized with, then devoured the chairs that enclosed It until the quaking lines gradually slowed and their details became crisp. Two forms emerged from this chaos, the first of which moved only with the labors of his breath, and like the pacing occupant, was left with no skin upon his chest. The line of his mouth mimicked the crack that split his breastbone, divulging the absence of a heart. The other man sat solid, lacking any remarkable features aside from his statuesque poise and lips that curled into vacuous smirk. His mouth peeled apart, as did the eyelids, to release a thin, black smoke from each of these three otherwise empty portals.

A sudden noise like low scraping at the far end of a long steel corridor stretched from the crack in The Frame's upper casing, revealing itself as a vent once used to

transmit thoughts in audible wavelengths. Reactivating the rusted gears that poured a reverberated whir through Its tubes, It tried to articulate this vision, but found these interior pipes clogged with the debris of inertia. Its attempted communiqué fell out in clumps of obscure, hollow grinding.

Two caretakers, concerned with The Frame's unusual behavior, rushed to Its aid. The first caretaker slowly, but firmly, tugged at the top and bottom edges of Its vent, while the second dropped in two pills and a small cup of cool water. The first caretaker snapped the vent shut, forcing the pills down a moistened channel. The Frame had achieved what It had seen some of the occupants manage before. It broke the pattern.

The first caretaker immediately began to jitter with youthful anticipation, breathing heavy and feverishly jerking his head to one side. Closer inspection revealed to The Frame that this man's eyes were missing, his head containing only vacant hollows that dribbled slow, crimson tears. His accomplice did not seem to notice, instead gazing off through the distance at the sun as it set behind solid walls. The hands used only an instant before to intoxicate The Frame had splintered away and hemorrhaged at the wrists.

Its orbs lost focus and the contents of the room slowly shifted into a unified blur of color and motion as the caretakers wheeled It from the designated position. The Frame slipped into peaceful dreariness watching each pattern melt away into this incomprehensible new cycle.

It occasionally regained consciousness; though only for transitory moments, as the caretakers paid particular attention to Its orbs and were quick to administer progressing degrees of medication. A single yellow pill became two blue pills became a green pill and a small cup of white liquid three times daily. The Frame was left a broken, leaking contraption, a lay figure beneath the unspoken demands of Its caretakers.

Clocks spun incessantly around The Frame's muted awareness, the pacing occupant rotating with the clicking numbers. Its provisions steadily became more substantial, less prescribed. When the caretaker's rounds brought them to The Frame, It was careful to let the drugs dissolve within the vent and seep out as sediment in the river that ran along Its figure. When the caretakers finally wheeled The Frame back toward Its customary place, a blank television caught Its attention. Its orbs searched the dark grays of the screen and picked up reflected details of a skeletal man standing at Its side; thin, pale, wrinkled and bearing nothing apart from shame. Where the mouth should sit, there was only seasoned skin, the jawbones beneath left to creak with desire.

Returned to Its comfortable corner, The Frame regained focus and locked Its orbs onto the legs of splintered chairs and the bars fixed on the windows. It searched for familiar faces in dirty floor tiles, but only eyes of thick dust gazed back. Back through The Frame's fogged orbs. Back into the vacillating contrivances that lingered within Its upper casing. Back to the most intrinsic, yet least accessible element of The Frame's existence.