

Ones and Zeros

There was nothing at first, only an endless abyss of light. Then came the blue flash, and the world generated anew in less than a billionth of a second.

Stephen's eyes swung open. He was standing in the middle of a beautiful, untouched forest, his brown shoes brushing against the blades of grass which all seemed to be currently being swept by the wind's breeze simultaneously. A vast, clear lake could be seen in the distance. Stephen caught a glance of something peculiar beyond the lake; the green hills, trees, even the lake's water, all suddenly stopped before a massive chasm that stretched onward infinitely. There was no horizon, only the blue hue of the sky.

Stephen's face carried no expression whatsoever; a blank canvas. Then without knowing it, he began to run forward towards a nearby tree. There were several wooden branches resting on the ground beneath the shadow of the tree. Stephen picked them all up, but after a few seconds of his palm gripping onto them, they completely vanished. The endless chasm had moved further away, and some new terrain appeared to have generated out of nowhere at the previous spot where land met the abyss.

There were some rock formations near the distant lake. Stephen ran towards them, jumping as he did so. He felt a sudden ache in his abdomen while on the way as if something had suddenly punched his stomach. He was unable to look down to check on it, he was not allowed to.

When Stephen finally arrived at the rock formation, his right hand picked up some shards of stone that had broken off. They immediately vanished when they touched the hand's palm. He began to notice that he performed the exact same movements with his hand every time he went to pick up another shard.

Once all the stone shards had been picked off the ground, Stephen's body paused briefly. Some white sparks suddenly accumulated on his hands and a makeshift hatchet materialized on them. He now wielded it with his right hand. Stephen could not comprehend what was happening or how it was happening.

Stephen looked beyond the lake. A grandiose desert had appeared. He looked all around him, saw mountains in the distance that grazed the sky, another forest with trees that towered over the ones that currently surrounded him, a tower with half of it missing. The tower needed to be explored, so he sprinted off towards it.

He ran and jumped just like he did before. He felt another sudden ache originate at his abdomen, though it felt much more painful than the last one. He desperately wanted to move his eyes to look at the area from which the pain originated, but they were completely unmovable, forced to remain looking forwards.

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Before long, he had arrived at the tower. It casted a shadow which made his figure among its darkness look as small as those stone shards at the rock formation. The tower's door had been knocked down onto the ground, freely allowing entrance to any passerby.

Stephen stepped into the interior of the tower and immediately headed to a spiral staircase and navigated through the second floor, as if he had been here before, as if he knew the layout of the tower by memory. He had no recollection of ever visiting such a tower. His current understanding led him to believe he had been brought into existence just some minutes ago.

As Stephen traveled through the second floor, his shoes accidentally pressed too hard on a derelict section of the wooden floor, causing it to emit a loud noise that reverberated through the entire tower. The entire floor nearly collapsed from one misstep.

A deep, monstrous growl came from above, followed by a thump that shook the ceiling. Then came another thump, and then another; it became the sound of walking, walking that approached the staircase.

Stephen rushed towards the staircase with careless stomps. The creature that lurked above produced another loud growl and the cyclical sound of the thumps dramatically increased in frequency. Stephen felt great fear that he was not allowed to express outwardly.

Just as he was about to exit the tower through the spot he came through, the creature tackled him from behind and knocked him onto the ground. Stephen now looked at the creature clearly, saw the black scales that occupied its large body, the spikes that protruded from the top of its head, its terrifying split jaw, the fields of teeth and the slender tongue that extended from the back of its mouth, the eyes void of color that presumably were now staring into the deepest part of himself.

Stephen felt fear overwhelming his mind, though the same could not have been said for his body. His body responded in a way that seemed like it was *used* to this. It stood up and dodged all the bites that the creature threw at it. When the creature violently lunged at him, his body was prepared and made the perfect movements to get out of its way. His hands swung the hatchet at the creature, but just as they did, he felt a great pain in his abdomen again.

The swing stopped midway, allowing the creature to lunge at him and push him a great distance backwards. But his body didn't hit the ground immediately, instead it entered a state of free fall for about a second before it finally struck the hard ground. The pain Stephen felt was enormous, like every part of his body had broken, like he was one hit away from game over.

Nevertheless, his body was still able to stand up. His weak eyes detected that he was now inside a deep ravine. They looked up and saw the leaves of trees peaking out and the blurry clouds beyond them.

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A crackling noise roared from above, followed by a whoosh-like repeating sound that kept increasing in frequency. The creature's terrifying figure then appeared and began descending into the ravine. Some beautiful wings had sprouted out of the creature's back and they extended outwards.

Stephen's hand tightened its grip on the hatchet and his body took a firm stance as it prepared for the incoming attacks. His personal fear had not relaxed at all, it kept building up and now it did so even faster as he found himself trapped as a desperate, foul beast zeroed in on his position.

The creature finally touched the ground with its two long legs and immediately lunged at Stephen. He dodged the creature's attack, letting it crash into the sturdy rock wall that was behind him. Stephen's hands took this opportunity to attempt to swing the hatchet into the creature. The hatchet's sharp stone blade dug into the creature's back, causing it to produce an ear-piercing screech.

The hatchet was pulled out and swung into the creature again. Then it was pulled out again, but just before the next swing, the creature extended one of its legs towards Stephen. He dodged the kick just milliseconds before it was about to hit his torso by jumping back.

The creature flapped its wings again and began to ascend out of the ravine. Stephen saw no way out of the ravine to keep pursuing it. Walls of rock suffocated him. He had nothing except the hatchet which had now broken in half.

His body completely froze, but after a few seconds, it fell to the ground as if every muscle in it had given up. Stephen groaned out of pain. He moved his eyes to inspect his surroundings. *He* moved them. He reached out with his arms to feel the rocky surface of the walls and the floor. He felt he had finally claimed control over his own body, over his own movements.

Everything around him suddenly changed color into a shade of red, green, and blue. The gray rocks of the ravine had all transformed to a blinding shade of green, yet kept their original shape and geometry. Stephen noticed that the colors appeared to vibrate rapidly. He placed his face against the nearest rocky wall and focused his sight onto it.

The wall transformed into tens of millions of arrangements of ones and zeros. The ones shifted to zeros then back to ones and then to zeros again. They repeated this process thousands of times in less than a hundredth of a second. Stephen looked around; everywhere he looked there were shifting ones and zeros.

Everything abruptly disappeared; only an endless abyss of light remained now. Then came the blue flash, and the world generated anew in less than a billionth of a second.

Stephen's eyes swung open. He was standing at the top of a snowy mountain, overlooking a beautiful, untouched forest, his brown shoes brushing against the cold snow. His face carried no expression whatsoever; a blank canvas.