

“Stupid Virus”
by Tom Badrick

Sheep.

That's all they were. It's all they would ever be. It's all they ever *hoped* to be. If only they'd open their eyes.

But Peter Raspin new better. They would never open their eyes. It had already been how long? Six thousand years in the least, that number itself coming from a mottled pile of some of the most ignorant. Likely thousands more beyond that. Still, after all these millennia of 'evolution' and 'progress', the sheep were still the sheep. And boy, was interacting with them irritating.

Peter knew he was no sheep; his standardized test scores told him otherwise, as did his choice news sources and the tiny social circle of which he considered to be as close to friends as he could tolerate. More honestly, however, he hated half of them, and the other half were merely okay. In the very least, they could hold their own in a conversation, even if only for a few short minutes.

What good were the sheep, then, if not for discussion? Oxygen thieves, if you asked him. Wasted investments. Technology had advanced to such a stage that the paltry, manual labor jobs that were once dependent upon large numbers of sheep to perform were now automated by sophisticated robotics and computer systems. The foolish masses were merely a relic of a bygone age, and now only remained to feed on the squishy underbelly of the few brilliant minds who kept the system going. Functionless parasites and willing slaves, all of them.

Peter grew tired of arguing with the blunted masses for one day. He arose from his computer and stretched as tall as he could, and listened to the popping symphony of his sedentary joints. It had been many hours since he last left his matted office chair, but he never abandoned a heated debate until all parties involved were completely drained of both will and protest.

This last argument was of a particularly interesting subject: drone aircraft. He was exceptionally satisfied with how he riddled his competition with rapid-fire logic and poignant interjections regarding the obvious division of morality and ethics. Of course, to any other observer, he was merely slinging sharp insults at any poor sap who

chose to argue against his point of view. But what did it matter: they were too stupid to be thinking for themselves, anyway. That was the White House's job. They should all thank their lucky stars that there are laws to mandate appropriate safety labeling to ensure they did not asphyxiate in their sleep on their own toothbrushes. Or maybe something else inexplicably ridiculous.

A stupid virus.

Peter giggled to himself as he laboriously toiled over the construction of a ham and cheese sandwich. If only there was a virus that could eradicate all of the stupid people in the world. One swipe, all dead. No more sheep. What a paradise would be left for the handful of intelligent, free-thinkers the world had to offer!

How would it work? Great question. He wasn't well-versed in biology (Which is why he would never involve himself in a debate of the subject. Not with someone evidently better informed, anyway), but he supposed it could do the job. It would have to be transferred sexually, obviously, as those ridiculous sheep can never think past their own damn genitals. They can never see what they are doing to their world by filling it with their ignorant, wailing spawn. Then, when the virus took hold, he supposed it would affect its targets based around brain waves and synapse patterns. The idiots and fools of the world clearly had a common cranial shortcoming, and its effects would be deadly to only those who shared that mutual malfunction. Within the more intelligent, the virus would peacefully coexist, much like any of the other millions of microscopic lifeforms which inhabit the human body.

A retrovirus, maybe. Something that mutated quickly and was able to stay several steps ahead of any curing efforts. This would be very tricky, as most of the minds racing to find a way to stop this epidemic would also be unaffected by its intrusion. He mused to himself that the only fatal flaw of doctors and scientists was their unwarranted degree of compassion for humanity's refuse.

No. That was just too slow. How long would it take a sexually-transmitted virus to infect seven billion worldwide? Years? Decades? Way too long. Way, way too long. He'd never live to enjoy the aftermath, and that's what this was all about.

It didn't need to be a virus, of course. It could also be a bacteria. Airborne diseases spread like wildfire wherever they arise, and are

reputedly difficult to quarantine. It could have a lengthy incubation period of several days to a few weeks before symptoms would arise. That way, it could spread silently, and infect many before it was even identified. And for the symptoms? Only one, of course. Instantaneous death, swift and without pain. The desire to minimize the suffering when culling a lesser being was purely a human trait. Peter wasn't just a genius; he was also a humanitarian.

With a pair of sandwiches and a tall glass of orange juice, Peter decided to return to his desk to begin another round of cerebral sparring, of which he was certain to take home another dozen victories. But before he could administer another literary beating to the unwashed masses, he continued his lunch break tradition and consulted the global news. Of course, local stations only cared about football and celebrity whores better off buried, so it went without saying that he looked past it regularly with not so much as a single uncaring glance.

It was when he accessed his favorite British news site that he had suddenly noticed something completely out of the ordinary. According to an article so breaking that it updated itself with every page refresh, an unknown illness had erupted in a crowded, lower class section of London that morning, and seemed to be rapidly spreading to surrounding areas. Though it was still too soon for scientists to determine the exact nature of this malady, it was causing many people to die with little to no sign of prior sickness. Perfectly healthy individuals were seen collapsing in the streets, and those affected seemed to them to be completely random as young and old alike fell victim to the unknown illness. While the British government worked tirelessly to attempt to contain the infection, the mysterious illness continued to spread at an unprecedented rate

For the next several days, Peter watched on as this deadly plague continued to rip through the globe, leaving millions of bodies in its wake. As states of emergency were declared in one nation after another, researchers were completely baffled to the cause of the epidemic, and its approximate 95% mortality rate. What they had learned, however, was that the victims of the outbreak had all died by the same cause. Though the disease itself had no trace that was currently discernible, the cause of death in all victims studied was the near-instant failure of the victim's brain stem. After the failure, the victim would become comatose, and, unable to breathe, death of the

rest of the brain would very shortly follow.

Government investigations revealed no evidence that this was a chemical attack, nor was it a mutation of an already existing disease. Tabloid sites grew fond of the 'Andromeda Strain' idea that this sickness came from outer space. Unfortunately, many of those who perpetuated that idea fell victim to the rampaging plague on the very same day. It was especially peculiar when all of Hollywood fell victim to the sickness in a single evening. Much of the remaining population erupted into a panic upon realizing they would never be able to see a 241st comic book superhero movie, and they too began to die off as Mother Nature continued to shake off more and more of her pesky little insects.

But when Peter returned to his favorite forum, that was when he realized what this illness had really been: a gift from God. His friends were there as usual, debating and discussing the one topic everyone had been covering for the past week. The flock of sheep, however, seemed to be significantly reduced. As another day progressed, he sealed himself in his home as the illness made its way into his hometown. In that time, the number of sheep still left posting had dropped to zero. All that was left on his favorite forums was himself and his 'friends'. The sheep were all gone. Every last one of them.

He posted with enthusiasm that his long-standing wish had finally come true. The virus he silently hoped for that would wipe out the stupid and the useless was now doing exactly what he dreamed of. The sheep were being culled, and he was ecstatic. On the other side of the forum, his 'friends' shunned his enthusiasm over a plague that had literally killed over two billion people and didn't show any signs of slowing.

One of his 'friends', in an even darker mood than him, suggested he take a step outside into the massacre to see if he was really as smart as he believed. If his 'stupid virus' really only killed just that, then he should have nothing to fear. Peter scoffed at the suggestion, and laughed to himself as he pried his bottom from his chair once again. He hadn't slept in at least a day, as the event that was currently shaking the globe was just too interesting to step away from. A repetitive warning could be heard from the emergency alert speakers outside, demanding that all surviving citizens remain indoors until further notice, and their lives were at risk otherwise. He would heed the warning later, of

course. But at that moment, he had something to prove to himself and his peers.

Crossing his cluttered living room to his front door, Peter paused for a brief moment of reflection. Despite his own reassurance that he was one of the brightest minds on the planet, he had a brief moment of doubt. Was he of the right mental aptitude to respond to this virus without harm? His peers still lived, and he was certainly smarter than all of them. What harm could possibly come to him?

His own ego was the only self assurance he really needed. He arrogantly tossed his fears aside with a single shrug and stepped out his front door.

The streets outside buzzed loudly with warning sirens, but Peter saw nobody else moving about except for himself. The roads were empty and Somerton's inhabitants were all obediently at home, praying to whatever God they believed in that the plague would not harm them. Just like the sheep they were.

Peter took a deep breath of air, and exhaled contentedly. The air felt fresher without so many sheep around breathing it. He stepped out into the street and took another deep breath. He had passed this test with flying colors. The virus was there, but he remained unharmed, just as he expected. As he laughed to himself, he glanced up into a beautiful blue sky, and a flock of birds flew over his head. He briefly fantasized just how wonderful a place the world was about to become. Just as soon as the disease ran its course and the bodies were disposed of (A shame to not have any sheep to handle that grisly job), Earth would be his personal paradise. He couldn't wait to return to his forums and gloat to his peers. He'd survived the virus, and it felt great to be alive.

More correctly, it felt great to be alive for those few moments in which he still was. Distracted by his own celebration in the middle of a once busy street, he never even saw the municipal bus that barrelled around that blind corner and hit him, sending his lifeless body tumbling violently into the curb, and thus ending his fantasy before it could even begin. Peter Raspin may have been a genius, but his sense of situational awareness could have been a little better.