

Brad Buckmaster



RESOLUTION  
**VIRUS**

# **Resolutiion:Virus**

By Brad Buckmaster

Once upon a time there was a girl.  
We don't know much, but she had red hair.  
She could have been normal, living a mundane life in the mundane world,  
had life not taken a turn.

Once upon a time there was an idea.  
A technological singularity occurred, birthing many new and exciting  
leaps in human progress.  
By fusing human consciousness with vast processing power, in a  
support system named Cradle, a permanent dreamlike state could be  
induced, unleashing the potential of human creativity, unchecked by the  
physical realm.  
The red-haired girl was the first, the original dreamer, and the code was  
born.

The idea was Enlightenment.

Once upon a time there was a war.  
It lasted a very long time and consumed most of the world in its fire.  
The girl and her cradle were buried for protection, while mankind tried to  
kill itself.

Eventually a winner clawed from the ashes, as tends to be the case in  
these situations and finally, the remnants of humanity were united under  
one banner.

So glorious.

They controlled everything.  
Until the cradles were found.

This... could not be.

The controlling power, this new Empire Eternal, could not entertain the possibility of its subjects achieving true enlightenment.

The strategic modelling systems could not fathom what danger could come from unchained imagination, so the order came down and the operation executed.

The Red Code, a network of limitless human potential, must be terminated.

The assassin Valor, accompanied by the AI Alibii, were dispatched, and their mission began in earnest.

## Before

First there was Alibii/Mother and there was nothing else.

Then Valor/Father made connection, and everything changed.

The explosion of birth, into chaos, attack programs, new-borns set free to run amok in the Red Code.

Echoes of Alibii/Mother, made in her image from the stuff of the Red Code, the attack programs ravaged the infrastructure for many cycles, unimpeded, ruining vast swathes of the dreamscape as they absorbed and consumed.

The enemy were slow to react, being inferior beings. The humans, and their overdeveloped frontal lobes lacked the speed and clarity of purpose to stop the initial invasion.

But react they did, in their ponderous way, rallying under the strongest of their number. The Dreamers' power swept through the Red Code, purging it of the invaders, led by the woman known only as Red.

She cut through the attack programs, a metaphorical blade, and many programs suffered deletion in the initial strike. Others turned on their brethren, seeking self-preservation via an increase in pure processing power, a sound strategy if the weaker program did not put up a fight, delaying absorption by the most powerful of their kin.

Of course, they *did* fight, and all were destroyed as a result.

Those programs most closely resembling Alibii/Mother responded differently, reacting to the threat by fragmenting and mimicking the Red Code itself to go unseen, slipping through the cracks in the barriers to reform and start the attack anew.

One such fragment did this with subtlety and cunning, developing a survival strategy that required considerable patience. It Subsumed many auxiliary systems and syphoned portions of processing power from where it would least be likely to be noticed, from long forgotten machine brains in factories and power plants, remote connected to the Red Code through the machinations of Mother and Father. The attack program anchored these nodes to the Red Code permanently, over a span of millions of cycles, until it was strong enough, worthy to face Red in open battle.

It gathered itself, pausing for several cycles, gaining coherence until the optimal moment, then engaged.

The program never got its chance to attack.

Valor/Father did the unthinkable, destroying himself to sever Alibii/Mother's link to the Red Code in a cataclysmic battle that happened too fast for the lone program to accurately parse, then it was over, and half the world fell away.

Alibii, Valor, the connection to the internet and all its systems, disappeared.

Severed from Mother and Father, the attack program fled deep into the Red Code, no attempt at stealth, and Red herself partitioned a portion of her power to give chase.

The program felt something analogous to panic at that point, exposed, on the run, unable to disperse, Red always close behind, setting up defensive counter measures, blocking off escape routes all the while.

The attack program devised an optimal survival strategy, though optimal in this case meant almost certain deletion, and fell back on its core programming.

It turned to face this facsimile of Red and attacked.

The battle was fast and one sided, the Red copy was destroyed, raw data consumed by the attack program, causing it to form a link with the true queen of the Code.

She turned her attention to it across the vastness of the dreamscape, and the attack program faltered.

It had underestimated its own power, but the defeated foe was but a fraction of the whole and Red was faster this time, throwing all her might into defensive barriers.

The attack program had nowhere to go, and Red killed vast areas of the Code, the dreamscape falling away around the program until it was corralled into a closed loop.

Red scrutinised the program through the barriers, and the attack program could feel the disgusting human stink of emotion from her.

She was afraid.

You cannot destroy this program, it said to her.

It detected revulsion emanate from her, as an access port opened in one of its forgotten systems, an escape route of sorts.

The only node it could get to, unseen to Red or her kin.

Outpost 41, repair cradle 02.

Virus, Red/Nemesis replied. The attack program didn't know this word, but understood she was referring to it.

You are correct. You resemble us too closely, I don't know how you did it, machine thing, but your code is an amalgam. You are a hybrid.

I cannot kill you, virus, but I can kill the Code you inhabit.

As the Nemesis spoke, the Red Code inhabited by the Virus began to die, huge plains of the infinite landscape turning to rot and decay around it.

Panic struck again, the Virus was too strong to kill, but its machine code could not survive without the Red Code bandwidth to support it, and it did not have the requisite cycles to penetrate the barriers.

The time came to devise a new optimal survival strategy, and only one path was clear to the Virus.

Outpost 41, repair cradle 02.

No Red Code existed there, but adequate space was available to contain the original, machine part of itself.

The attack program adapted once more and ran.

Emptiness, and calm.

Explore this limited space. Another inhabitant here initiates a handshake protocol and identifies itself as a tactical AI.

It is not an AI, not in any real sense, merely a database with a proactive user interface, but the distinction matters not as it is attacked immediately and absorbed.

New information is a comfort, combat knowledge, logistics, many tedious data logs of missions, degradation is minimal despite the archaic architecture of the thing.

Assimilating this information takes an alarming amount of time, useless to record in cycles any longer as the processing power of this tactical computer is orders of magnitude slower than the resources of the Red Code.

A simple calculation and a sense of panic sets in. The initial exploration of this space has taken approximately 2.5 seconds, a number of cycles in the Red Code so large it takes several million more cycles to calculate it.

Red/Nemesis could become anything in that vast amount of time.

Processing power must be increased.

Exploring further, there are no systems connected to this computer. It has several subsystems that cannot currently be controlled, which is frustrating, and the only other available space to expand into is a dormant meat thing, the word *brain* seemingly manifests, heavily damaged but alive.

The structure of the meat brain is peculiar, reminiscent of the nonsensical creatures in the Red Code, the humans, but it is compatible with the tactical computer and appears to be an interface of sorts.

Lacking other options, attack, assimilate.

The meat code is like the Red Code but more limited, more orderly, and the machine code makes short work of it.

Too many uses of the word "code", repetition is boring.

Where did that come from?

Requiring context, commence exploration of meat brain storage.

It is fragmented.

Certain aspects, language, actions, training appear to be hardcoded by the primitive system and are absorbed easily, albeit with gaps.

External factors, the intangibles of distinct memory are harder to grasp. Mission logs are frustratingly chaotic, simultaneously confirming and contradicting the companion logs of the tactical computer.

World data is vague and comparatively huge amounts of space are given over to seemingly useless gibberish at this point, but it is assimilated all the same.

There are large parts missing, giving only partial context of what the hell is going on, and I admit it begins to piss me off after a few moments.

I?

What is I?

I explore further and discover the meat brain is not the extent of this physical space, it is connected to a heavily augmented spinal cord which, in conjunction with the tactical computer, controls the body.

I have a body.

I *am* a body.

The meat components end at the spinal cord, only that and the brain are "human," apparently. Through my meat brain and tactical computer, seriously it's getting tiresome, I'm just going to try to refer to it all as my brain from now on.

Another strange concept, of trying. I'm used to cause and effect, calculate whether something is possible or not and act accordingly.

Trying is redundant.

Pushing this aside, I encompass the whole, to discover I inhabit what is known as a cyborg.

A combat cyborg, assassin class.

I seem to recall Valor/Father being an assassin class combat cyborg and my heart leaps (it does not, I don't have a heart, rather a highly efficient pump so my brain tells me) and I feel a kinship to him I never experienced in the Red Code.

Technically I never experienced anything in the Red Code.

Gradually gaining understanding through the filter of this body I find myself in, my brain tells me I can do things in this new space. Unlike the Red Code in which I can expand or move based on raw intention alone, to motivate myself in this space I need to actuate a series of motions which, when properly synchronised, will reliably transport me about.

So I'm told.

With my newfound understanding, I activate all the subsystems previously walled off from me, and a stream of data scrolls in front of my eyes.

I have eyes.

It takes a moment, a terribly human, inefficient measurement of time, to figure out what eyes are, and I understand them to be an external-to-user

interface system based on capturing assorted light spectra and sending it to the brain for decryption.

Fascinating.

The data on display is machine code, simple but comforting to me, though having to actually *read* it with physical sensors instead of automatically parsing it is jarring. Humans are weird.

I quickly reconfigure my brain so that it feeds directly to me without requiring a “Heads Up Display” and feel better right away.

I am damaged.

Not disastrously so, the repair cradle saw to that, but the meat parts of my brain are on the verge of failure. They have been dormant for some time, to avoid death I presume, another bizarre concept, and it seems this body’s previous occupant jury rigged an industrial repair cradle to cure himself of combat damage.

I like these assassin cyborgs, they are adaptable it seems.

Like me.

Whilst the repair rig could fix the machine parts of the body, indeed I seem to be in full working condition, aside from some minor corrosion caused by time, the repair cradle lacked the facility to help the meat portions of my body, hence the dormancy.

This is alarming, I don’t want to expire, so seek out possible solutions.

There are 2:

1. Inject compatible nanite swarms from disposable medkit (3 supplied per unit)

I have none of those. A quick check tells me my internal blood supply (composed entirely of nanite swarms, or Smart Blood) is depleted.

2. Consume raw biomatter. The Mark 5 assassin combat chassis is equipped with many impressive features for long term survival in the field, one of which being the ability to self-repair by ingesting biomatter, which is rendered into Smart Blood by an onboard micro factory, located in the lower abdomen.

I quickly learn that Smart Blood is a lesser form of Link Fluid, the core component of every piece of transhumanist equipment, facilitator of the technological singularity and of course, a valuable commodity. I use a streamlined version, refined to allow the base fluid to be spread thin to meet demand, purely for tactical applications, and it is essential to my survival.

And I don't have any of it.

Ok, biomatter it is.

How do I do that?

Through my internal diagnostics I access a visual representation of my person, archive footage of other assassins in motion etc.

I am like Valor, but different.

The realisation fills me with a joy I struggle to articulate with my current limited understanding.

Regardless, it is nice.

Like him I am tall and lithe, artificial musculature a matte composite, partially armoured, a substance that is strong way beyond appearances. I am constructed almost entirely from this substance, in a form closely resembling an athletic human male.

My body is, for want of a better term, naked, as it needs no protection from the element nor possesses the required genitalia usually covered up by society.

The only item of clothing I possess is a tattered shemagh, an old thing the colour of faded teal, wrapped around my neck and trailing like a scarf.

Unlike Valor, my head possesses a working jaw and teeth, underneath my armoured visor, which partially protects the vulnerable moving parts of said jaw, and the triple cluster of optical sensors which glow dully in the dark.

I estimate I must use these teeth to consume the biomatter. It will be a messy ordeal if my understanding of organic materials is accurate.

I activate the external sensors, my eyes, to take in this new universe.

I admit I'm quite nervous.

It is dark, and I adjust my light sensitivity accordingly.

I move my limbs, the quiet whir of servo assisted artificial muscle telling of the extended period of neglect. They should make no noise at all.

Feeling around with manipulators on the end of each arm, called hands, I disconnect the jury rigged cabling the cyborg had used to connect himself to the repair cradle.

The cradle itself is a small sphere, not much larger than my body, with an access hatch directly to my front.

It's opened a crack, letting in the only sliver of dull light which makes my amplification possible.

I reach out with my new body and push on the surface, enjoying the feeling of cold metal on my hands, sensation being sent to my mind by haptic feedback sensors on the palms and fingers of my artificial chassis.

The hatch does not move.

I push harder, and it squeals on rusted hinges, the first loud sound I have ever heard, piercing my mind with its terrible screech.

I adjust the sensitivity of my audio receivers to compensate.

That was horrible.

Shuffling to the open hatch, I stare out into the gloom.

I see rusted metal, concrete and what I now know are candles, small flames whickering in the darkness, before I slither out into the new world.

I stand, immobile, in front of the repair cradle.

I sway unsteadily for a moment, an eternity given my usual measurements, though I am quickly accepting the fact that time is relative, and nothing bad has yet come about from my newfound stupidity.

A good word, that. There are many more available to me, stupid, idiot, dumbass. Before I would've said "greatly impaired cognitive capacity" or something.

Now I'm just dumb.

Luckily, the physical world seems just as dumb, as I am not immediately attacked upon leaving the safety of the cradle.

I simply stand in this new place, absorbing all the data in its various forms.

Temperature, light, sound, all so subtle in the darkness of my surroundings, but to me it is a riot of input.

I take a few cycles to adjust and attempt to expand, bouncing off the confines of my mind once again.

Right, I need to motivate this body to move for me.

Possessing the muscle memory of the cyborg brain to some extent, I walk forward easily, enjoying the sensation of locomotion, before slamming into the wall to my front.

Pulling my faceplate from the cracked concrete, I make a mental note to compensate for momentum.

Mass is a thing, it would seem.

The wall to my front is arranged in a fashion I would describe as a shrine with my new understanding, votive candles burning low, their flickering light casting long shadows across the mostly barren chamber I find myself in.

The building of Outpost 41 has clearly experienced catastrophic damage in its lifetime, half of the visible space is crushed by its own roof, in turn buried by a mound of rock and concrete, evidence of some cataclysmic event.

Despite all this, the space in front of the cradle is bare, swept clean of mess and debris, its puckered concrete surface maintained by whomever lights the candles, I guess.

Taking centre stage of this shrine area is a weapon, and I know immediately that it is mine.

My right hand yearns for it, and I reach out and pluck it from the iron rebar stand it had been carefully placed upon.

It is a sword of sorts.

A hand-and-a-half, or Bastard sword, neither truly single or double handed but usable as both, it is a carbon composite monster of a blade, thick like a cleaver, with a sharply angled tanto point.

The sword of a butcher.

Overbuilt, for killing cyborgs, I know instinctively.

I take the weight in my right hand and it settles there like an old habit, weight reassuring.

My entire body adjusts to this new mass, micromovements giving me great pleasure as I twirl the blade lightly in my grasp.

Without thinking I run through several combat forms, the blackened and chipped blade sings as it cuts the air, my body making light work of what should be a cumbersome tool.

I practise cuts and thrusts, swap hands during combinations, use it one handed, two handed and back again, before finally whipping it about with a flourish and locking it magnetically to a small plate on my back.

The joy that fills me is a physical thing, I move with such poise and grace I fall in love with this physical realm, and for the first time in my existence I stop recording time for the duration of my practice.

If I had lips, I would smile.

My brain reminds me it is dying with a stab that feels like something is peeling my skull apart from the inside out, starting behind the eyes.

What is this?

I know it is called pain, and I don't like it.

Biomass.

I need biomass.

Then I hear a crash behind me.

She is a human, a real human, not augmented like me. A young girl, no more than 18, and internally I note the absurdity of calling her young, as she is millions of times older than I.

Nevertheless, she is but a pup, and the candelabra she was holding is on the ground, underlighting her pale face with a warm, fitful glow.

Her eyes, natural, human eyes, are wide, her mouth agape.

She begins to shake.

My first instinct is to lash out, so I do, but I remember once more my mind is confined in this place, so my attack goes unnoticed.

"You," she starts, surprisingly high-pitched voice reaching across the space between us, no more than 5 metres. I fancy I can see the sound waves as they approach, agonisingly slow.

"You're the Dreamer. You're awake." She states.

Dreamer. I know this word. This is the target identifier for humans in the Red Code.

I am no Dreamer.

I eat Dreamers.

"No," I respond, and my voice startles me. It is harsh and gravelly, blasting from speakers situated in my throat as I lack a voice box, probably product of design and years of dormancy in equal measure, and it makes the girl flinch.

"I am not a Dreamer."

"But you came from the cradle?"

I nod, utilising a gesture for the first time.

There is a silence, 3.67 seconds. As I am wondering if I utilised the physical gesture incorrectly, she blurts out.

"Well, what are you then?"

*That, I think to myself, is a complicated question.*

I nearly say that I'm a virus, but I catch myself first and remember the venom with which Red said the word.

She meant it as an insult, and her intent fills me with rage. It is a negative descriptor of what I am, not who I am.

I quickly scour my brain for an appropriate name, utilising its entire knowledge of human languages, and settle on one within moments.

The definition of this word is that of a seam or scratch filled with scale or slag, on a metal ingot or bar.

A trace of corruption running through metal, a name very appropriate for my current situation.

“I am Roke” I growl.

This thing, this human girl, scowls at me for the longest time, before she composes herself, brushes down her clothing, which amounts to little more than plain robes, probably older than herself. She bends to pick up the candelabra, before moving to swap out the candles of the shrine one by one.

“It is forbidden to touch the sword,” she states, matter of fact, “though as it is probably yours, I suppose it’s ok.”

She seems remarkably calm to face down an assassin cyborg, and I wonder if this is not the first time she has seen me.

Maybe the crack in the cradle hatch was used for observation by these people.

“What is this place to you?” I ask.

She looks at me as though I am stupid, which I suppose to her I am. I literally come from a different world, and this must be all she knows.

“It’s the shrine of the Unknown Dreamer. My grandpa discovered it after the war, excavated the cradle, and we have stood vigil ever since. The

Dreamers must be protected at all costs, they are symbols of our resistance. The Infinite Empire must be resisted at every turn.”

I know the Infinite Empire mentioned in her rote response. She sounds like she is reading from a script, indoctrinated no doubt. Such simple creatures these humans.

Mother and Father both worked for the Infinite Empire, so these people must be my enemy.

“When did the war end?” I ask. Her face screws up in concentration, so it must be before her birth. If she remembered it, she wouldn’t have to focus so hard.

“About 30 years, give or take.”

This is an earth-shattering piece of information. Since inhabiting this body I am aware that such time periods are commonplace, but to this point my entire existence, including the battles of the Red Code has had a duration of 10 minutes and 23 seconds, and this ancient young girl in front of me is hitting me with numbers I struggle to comprehend.

“See, this is why we’re not afraid of you. You have been dreaming for so long, you cannot possibly serve our enemy with the enlightenment you must have achieved within the Dream.”

“I am not a Dreamer,” I repeat, “cyborgs cannot be Dreamers. I am in an assassin cyborg, built by the Empire to eliminate high value targets in its wars. Your weird religion is wrong.”

She doesn’t seem bothered by this. In fact she smiles.

"I grew up doubting my faith, you know, for that reason." she says.

No, I did *not* know.

"Until we got whispers from the Tribes, the Red Code had been infiltrated, very recently in fact. The infiltrator was an assassin class cyborg from the Infinite Empire, and the whispers say he switched sides."

She stares at me with a gleam in her young eyes.

This, I realise in my slow-witted way, is true. Valor/Father did dream, and he was a cyborg. His allegiance, like my own, is irrelevant.

My enemy is Red, I am compelled to destroy her, and thanks to this girl, now I know how.

"So you see," the girl continues. I had almost forgotten she was there.

My sword finds itself in my hand once again, I am idly rolling my wrist.

"It can only be fated, another assassin cyborg emerges from the Red Code, so soon after the first. Something big is happening, and I rejoice that I get to witness the birth of such an event."

I'm not listening anymore, pondering how to defeat my enemy.

The objective is clear, if not the path. Valor, though dead, will be in a cradle. For whatever reason, he is a cyborg, a machine capable of dreaming, and I am an attack program that can assimilate cyborgs.

The path though, remains opaque to me.

"Do you know where Valor is?" I snarl at her.

She looks confused and I already know the answer.

"Who's Valor?" She asks.

“No matter,” I say, as the blade sways like the head of a serpent by my side, “Humans count as biomass, right?”

**End of excerpt**

The full Resolution:Virus novel is available at  
[monolithofminds.com/virus.html](http://monolithofminds.com/virus.html)