

## Chapter 39

PLACEHOLDER TEXT

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In a way, Chief Warrant Officer Cassidy Maran had had it pretty good for the last couple of months. Having been the one to catch Reidon Ward’s unprecedented Ability assignment late the previous year—and, more importantly, having had the sense to bring it directly to General Abel the moment she’d see it—Cassidy had earned herself not only a double promotion, but also a rather unique special assignment. There were definitely perks to that, sure. The biggest one was that she no longer had to work the graveyard shift. A couple of weeks working standard hours had gotten her sleep schedule back in line with normal humans, and that alone was worth almost anything. She saw daylight again, could *finally* catch up with some local friends at events other than awkward breakfasts for them—“dinner” for her—and had even started seeing a really sweet guy she’d met at a holiday in December. Things were almost perfect.

Almost.

“So. Damn. Boooooored!” Cassidy grumbled into her crossed arms, her head on the glass desk in front of her monitoring station.

Her office was *stellar* for an officer of her status. It wasn’t a corner room in the Central Command tower, but it *was* spacious and *did* have a window wall that let her turn her chair around and stare out of any time she wanted, which was pretty often. The view had taken her breath away for the first week or so, but there was honestly only so much of London one could take in from *any* height before the view eventually became mundane, and so Cassidy had quickly gone back to being bored from that too. The monotony was so visceral that she’d even started to find excuses to involve herself in the work of the officers in the units around her, something that had made her rather

popular as the new girl on the floor right out the gate. Still, everyone in the monitoring division had their own assignments, and there was only so much she could help with more she'd be inadvertently nosing in a business that was under her prevue, so back to the desk it was. The issue, at the end of the day, was the job. Unlike the other officers who made up the division, Cassidy only *one* CAD User to oversee, tasked to do so by Abel herself.

Reidon Ward.

It wasn't that Ward wasn't without his moments of interest, mind you. Only a couple weeks before Cassidy had nearly fallen out of her seat when the boy had gone through his most recent evolution only, so soon after his CAD had *last* upgraded. On top of that, watching his level of growth was astounding, and there were times that Cassidy felt like the kid was seem spec improvement every day of the week. The fact of the matter, though, was that Ward could have been the most interesting User in the ISC—and kind of *was*, honestly—but there was only so much of sitting and staring at a largely-unmoving monitor that Cassidy could do before she went mental.

“Maybe I'll take a vacation,” she muttered to herself, lifting her head and blinking blearily at the screen. “Somewhere nice. And warm. Bora Bora. Or Mercury. Yeah...”

She only managed to daydream for a couple of second before she caught herself and shook her head to clear her thoughts. No. None of she was a recent Chief Warrant Officer and new to this assignment. It wouldn't do to wish for leave she doubted she would have been granted even if she'd been dumb enough to ask for it. For the time being she was stuck in that office, and she'd best get used to it.

With a sigh Cassidy pushed herself to her feet and stretched, groaning as she lower back—sore from sitting all day—strained and popped. Deciding caffeine was the only solution to her ennui, she stepped around her desk out of her little office, only pausing to ask Captains Garret and Wekesa, her neighbors, if they wanted anything before heading straight for the break room. She took her time while she was there, checking

her NOED notifications and dumping in about four one too many sugars into her coffee before resigning herself to having to go back.

“Just get through it,” she told herself for the thousandth time in a month. “Just get through it. You won’t be here forever.”

Reentering her office and kicking the door closed behind her, Cassidy only grumbled a little as she plopped herself down in her chair and made herself comfortable. Holding her mug in both hands, she made to take a sip as forced herself to look at her monitor once again.

The coffee fell from her grasp onto the desk with a grasp, steaming liquid flying everywhere to splatter the glass, floor, wall, and Cassidy’s own uniform.

She didn’t notice. She just sat there staring, completely transfixed by the bright blue text inside the blinking orange alert frame that took up the entirety of the screen.

And and then Cassidy was gone, bolting from the office at full tilt, already ringing General Abel’s personal NOED. She was gone so fast, in fact, that Captain Garret and Wekesa both stuck their heads out of their own rooms in unison to see what was going on, exchanging a curious glance before both affirmed they had no idea what was going on. Cassidy had left her officer door open, though, and so Garret deliberately stepped inside to close it, careful not to look around as he did. It was an open secret that the Chief Warrant Officer was on special assignment, and any ISCM officer worth their salt new not to stick their nose in other peoples projects without invitation. For that reason, Garret pretended he couldn’t see the pulse of the orange light in the reflection of the window wall behind the desk. That was for the best, in the end, because if he’d taken the time to peer at the distorted words in the glass, taken the time to try to make them out backwards, he would have understood immediately that he had likely seen something he *very* much wasn’t supposed to.

*Priority Case: Ward, Reidon. C9.*

*User-Unique Ability Upgraded.*

*User-Unique Ability Assigned.*